

In Another World With My Smartphone

26

Patora Fuyuhara
Illustration • Eiji Usatsuka



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**BLAST FROM
THE PAST!
A GUILD-
SPONSORED
OUTING IN
BELFAST'S
CAPITAL!**



In Another World With My Smartphone 26



**"OH,
ANOTHER
ONE."**

**"HUH?
WHERE?"**

I came back from
my post-dinner bath
to find my children
sitting out on the
balcony talking to
each other. They
were gazing up at
the night sky.

**"THEY SAY
IF YOU MAKE
A WISH THREE
TIMES BEFORE
A SHOOTING
STAR VANISHES,
IT'LL COME
TRUE."**

**"WAIT,
REALLY?!"**

The kids
crowded around
with curiosity
burning in their
eyes. I couldn't
help but feel
I might have been
my own undoing
in that moment.



**“FATHER!
MOTHER!
LOOK AT
THIS!
IT’S FROM
DOCTOR
BABYLON!”**

Yoshino cheered
merrily as she held out
something in front of her.
It was a guitar, but smaller.
Kind of like a child-sized
guitar or something. What
surprised me the most was
that it appeared to be an
electric guitar... or, in other
words, a Stratocaster...

Character Profiles



Elze Silhoueska

One of Touya's wives. The elder of the twin sisters saved by Touya some time ago. A ferocious melee fighter, she makes use of gauntlets in combat. Her personality is fairly to-the-point and blunt. She can make use of Null fortification magic, specifically the spell **[Boost]**. She loves spicy foods.



Yumina
Urnea Belfast

One of Touya's wives. Princess of the Belfast Kingdom. She was twelve years old in her initial appearance, and her eyes are heterochromatic. The right is blue, while the left is green. She has mystic eyes that can discern the true character of an individual. She has three magical aptitudes: Earth, Wind, and Darkness. She's also extremely proficient with a bow and arrow. She fell in love with Touya at first sight.



Mochizuki Touya

A highschooler who was accidentally murdered by God. He's a no-hassle kind of guy who likes to go with the flow. He's not very good at reading the atmosphere, and typically makes rash decisions that bite him in the ass. His mana pool is limitless, he can flawlessly make use of every magical element, and he can cast any Null spell that he wants. He's currently the Grand Duke of Brunhild.



Sushie
Urnea Ortlinde

One of Touya's wives. She was ten years old in her initial appearance. Her nickname is Sue. The niece of Belfast's king, and Yumina's cousin. Touya saved her from being attacked on the road. She has an innocently adventurous spirit.



Lucia Leah
Regulus

One of Touya's wives. The Third Princess of the Regulus Empire, she's Yumina's age. She fell in love with Touya when he saved her during a coup. She likes to fight with twin blades, and she's on good terms with Yumina.



Kokonoe Yae

One of Touya's wives. A samurai girl from the far eastern land of Eashen, a country much like Japan. She tends to repeat herself and speak formally, she does. Yae is quite a glutton, eating more than most normal people would dare touch. She's a hard worker, but can sometimes slack off. Her family runs a dojo back in Eashen, and they take great pride in their craft. It's not obvious at first, but her boobs are pretty big.



Linze Silhoueska

One of Touya's wives. The younger of the twin sisters saved by Touya some time ago. She wields magic, specifically from the schools of Light, Water, and Fire. She finds talking to people difficult due to her own shy nature, but she is known to be surprisingly bold at times. Rumors say she might be the kind of girl who enjoys male on male romance... She loves sweet foods.



Paula

A stuffed toy bear animated by years upon years of the **[Program]** spell. She's the result of two-hundred years of programmed commands, making her seem like a fully aware living being. Paula... Paula's the worst!



Sakura

A mysterious girl Touya rescued in Eashen. She had lost her memories, but has now finally gotten them back. Her true identity is Farnese Forneus, daughter of the Xenoahs Overlord. Currently living a peaceful life in Brunhild, and she has joined the ranks of Touya's wives.



Leen

One of Touya's wives. Former Clan Matriarch of the Fairies, she now serves as Brunhild's Court Magician. She claims to be six-hundred-and-twelve years old, but looks tremendously young. She can wield every magical element except Darkness, meaning her magical proficiency is that of a genius. Leen is a bit of a light-hearted bully.



Hildegard
Minas Lestia

One of Touya's wives. First Princess of the Knight Kingdom Lestia. Her swordplay talents earned her a reputation as a 'Knight Princess.' Touya saved her life when she was attacked by a group of Phrase, and she's loved him ever since. She's a good friend of Yae, and she stammers a bit when flustered.



Luli

The fourth of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She is the Azure Monarch, the ruler of dragons. She often clashes with Kohaku due to her condescending personality.



Kougyoku

The third of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She is the Flame Monarch, ruler of feathered things. Though her appearance is flashy and extravagant, she's actually quite cool and collected.



Sango and Kokuyou

The second of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. They are the Black Monarch, two in one. The rulers of scaled beasts. They can freely manipulate water. Sango is a tortoise, and Kokuyou is a snake. Sango is a female, and Kokuyou is a male (but he's very much a female at heart).



Kohaku

The first of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She's the White Monarch, the ruler of beasts, the guardian of the west and a beautiful White Tiger. She can create devastating shockwaves, and also change size at will.



High Rosetta

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Workshop, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Rosetta for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #27. For whatever reason, she's the most reliable of the bunch.



Francesca

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Hanging Garden, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Cesca for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #23. She likes to tell very inappropriate jokes.



Mochizuki Moroha

The God of Swords. Claims to be Touya's older sister. She trains the and advises the knights of Brunhild. She's gallant and brave, but also a bit of an airhead at times.



Mochizuki Karen

The God of Love. Claims to be Touya's older sister. She stays in Brunhild because she says she needs to catch a servile god, but doesn't really do all that much in the way of hunting him. She's a total pain in the butt.



Pamela Noël

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Tower, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Noël for short and wears a jersey. Her Airframe Serial Number is #25. She sleeps all the time, and eats laying down. Her tremendous laziness means she doesn't do all that much.



Preliora

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Rampart, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Liora for short and wears a blazer. Her Airframe Serial Number is #20. She's the oldest of the Babylon Gynoids, and would attend to the... Personal night-time needs of Doctor Babylon herself. She has no experience with men.



Fredmonica

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Hangar, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Monica for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #28. She's a funny little hard worker who has a bit of a casual streak. She's a good friend of Rosetta, and is the Gynoid with the most knowledge of the Frame Gears.



Bell Flora

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Alchemy Lab, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Flora for short and wears a nurse outfit. Her Airframe Serial Number is #21. A nurse with dangerously big boobs and even more dangerous medicines.



Doctor Regina Babylon

An ancient genius from a lost civilization, reborn into an artificial body that resembles a small girl. She is the "Babylon" that created the many artifacts and forgotten technologies scattered around the world today. Her Airframe serial number is #29. She remained in stasis for five-thousand years before finally being awakened.



Atlantica

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Research Lab, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Tica for short. Her Airframe serial number is #22. Of the Babylon Numbers, she is the one who best embodies Doctor Babylon's inappropriately perverse side.



Lileleparshe

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Storehouse, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Parshe for short and wears a shrine maiden outfit. Her Airframe Serial Number is #26. She's tremendously clumsy, even if she's just trying to help. The amount of stuff she ruins is troublingly high.



Irisfam

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Library, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Fam for short and wears a school uniform. Her Airframe Serial Number is #24. She's a total book fanatic and hates being interrupted when she's reading.

The Story So Far!

Mochizuki Touya, wielding a smartphone customized by God himself, continues to live his life in a newly formed double-world! The war against the Wicked God, which threatened the existence of two innocent worlds, has finally come to an end. Touya has emerged victorious, but at what cost? Now he's saddled with divine duties! Awakened to godliness! Our hapless young lad is to be caretaker of the newly-created world. Fortunately, things seem to be at peace. But could this only be a surface observation? The seeds of discord are sown out of sight, and chaos could very well burst from the dark... How will Touya fare in his new station? Only time will tell.

The Worlds of In Another World With My Smartphone World Map





Retrospective: An Adventure in the Capital

I had a dream. It was about the time when me and the others were still living in Belfast's capital. It was only a few weeks after I'd killed my first Dragon in Mismede, back when we'd returned home after that trip. I wasn't married at that point. Hell, I wasn't even engaged. I wasn't a grand duke either... It was just me as Touya, the adventurer.

◇ ◇ ◇

"A guild-sponsored adventurer contest?"

A poster outside the guild caught my eye as we walked past the building. I didn't know what an adventurer contest would even cover, so I took a closer look at the piece of paper.

"In order to show the public how indispensable adventurers are, we're hosting a contest that puts your skills to use in the name of public good! Anyone registered with the guild is eligible to participate. The winning prize is ten platinum coins, and there's a special bonus prize consisting of one set of mithril armor," Yumina said, reading out the description on the post.

The prize was ten platinum coins...or roughly ten million yen. That was pretty impressive. Even the best adventurers wouldn't normally make that kind of money. Mithril armor was first-class equipment too. The guild was clearly sparing no expense when it came to the prizes.

"This seems interesting, it does. Shall we participate?"

"Putting our skills to use? Like how? Do they mean fighting monsters and stuff?"

“Maybe they’ll judge us based on how well we strip materials from our hunts?”

Yae, Elze, and Linze all looked over the poster with curious eyes. Everyone seemed to be interested in giving it a try. Yumina was green-ranked, but the rest of us were blue. Blue-ranks were typically considered veterans, but it had been less than a year since we’d joined. That alone was enough to make us stand out among the adventurers that took jobs from the royal capital’s guild.

Yumina was the princess of Belfast, but she didn’t attract any undue attention when we were out in public. That was thanks to a magical artifact she wore that prevented her from being recognized as a member of the royal family. She was a well-known public figure, so I didn’t want anyone hassling her out on the street. With that in mind, I didn’t really want us to do anything too crazy and stand out in Belfast.

I peeked at the terms and conditions listed at the bottom of the poster.

“Oh, hey, it’s a party-based exercise. Looks like it’s for parties with up to five members.”

Me, Elze, Linze, Yae, and Yumina. Nice. That’s all of us. An easy five.

“So then, we gonna try it?”

“I don’t see why not. Events like these are always interesting.”

“I am of the same mind, I am. This will be a good chance for us to test our skills.”

Elze and Yae seemed highly motivated, while Linze didn’t seem quite as enthused, though she still gave a nod. Yumina nodded as well, but she was smiling.

Hmm... I dunno if we can win this thing, but it might be fun to just participate.

“Let’s go then, all five of us.”

We headed to the guild desk and I handed over my guild card to register us for the contest. They needed a party name, so I named us Brunhild, after the weapon I’d recently crafted. The entry fee was two silver coins per person... I hadn’t realized you had to pay to participate. That was like twenty thousand yen, so with five of us, it wasn’t cheap at all...

I begrudgingly paid the entry fee and took my guild card back from the receptionist when she suddenly spoke up.

“I didn’t think you’d be participating in this, Mr. Mochizuki...”

“Huh? Why?”

I didn’t really understand what she was getting at, so I raised an eyebrow in confusion. Did she think I was antisocial, perhaps?

My reaction amused the woman at the desk, prompting a little chuckle before she replied, “Oh, I didn’t mean anything by it. It’s just that you’re a renowned Dragonslayer, yes? Even if you’re a blue-rank, I’m sure the other participants will see you as quite the threat. They might even want to see you eliminated from the running first.”

“Ah...”

I’d totally forgotten. After I’d killed the Black Dragon back in Mismede, I’d been granted the Dragonslayer title by the guild. The symbol for it was etched into the blue guild card I used every day. It was obvious people would notice at some point!

“Ugh... Damn it.”

“W-Well, you never know. Some other higher-ranked adventurers might participate, and that may take some of the heat off you.”

Higher-ranked adventurers...? So red-ranks, then? Those are the top-tier adventurers, or at least, that's how I understand it. The wall between blue and red is a high one, so there aren't many who've scaled it.

"Actually, wait, how many people in Belfast currently rank higher than me?"

"There are roughly one hundred and fifty red-ranked adventurers in Belfast, Mr. Mochizuki. As for the rank above that, silver, there are only three."

"Only three?"

"The silver ranking is afforded only to the best of the best, Mr. Mochizuki. They're all heroes in their own right. Though honestly, I doubt any of them would be participating in this contest."

The receptionist smiled politely as if to reassure me. I wondered why they wouldn't participate. Was ten platinum coins chump change for heroes like them?

"The last time we promoted an adventurer to silver was eighteen years ago. He was over thirty years old at the time, so..."

"Oh, I get it. They're all retired already."

Adventurers typically didn't have long tenures. Unless they were from long-living species like the elves, most adventurers retired in their midthirties and moved to another profession. Some of them even joined the guild in an official capacity to help nurture the next generation. Dolan from the Silver Moon and Barral from the Eight Bears weapon store were retired adventurers, come to think of it.

"And that's that. Your participation has been registered. Here's your entry card. Please bring all members of your Brunhild party to the morning meeting. Next, please!"

There were other adventurers behind me in a line, so I grabbed the entry card and headed out. Hopefully, there'd be some red-rank adventurers participating, I didn't like the idea of everyone else targeting my team.

Then again, the Dragonslayer title was rare even among red-ranks...so it was entirely possible I'd still get harassed. I decided not to think about it, since the most important thing was to have fun.

With the entry card in hand, I headed back to the girls.

◇ ◇ ◇

It was the day of the contest.

"Wow, this is a pretty big event..."

Belfast's royal capital had a central park and plaza that was used to host big displays for the public. It was also often used as a recreational ground for the citizens to relax and enjoy themselves in. Typically, the place was lined with carts and stalls selling all kinds of food, and merchants would peddle their wares to passersby. Today, however, there were no merchants or food stalls to be found.

Even though it was so early, there were a great number of adventuring parties gathered in the plaza. Some were hazarding guesses as to the nature of the contest, while others were inspecting their weapons closely.

"Everyone seems so excited, they do," Yae said as she walked around, admiring the sights around her.

They sure did. Part of the motivation was money, but this was a good chance for people to put their names out there. If you performed well in this contest, you could easily get more work. Plus, there was always the possibility of rising upward in the guild rankings.

"We're kinda drawing some attention, huh?"

“We’ve got the first Dragonslayer in a long time with us. It’s not really that surprising.”

Linze’s response to Elze was curt, but true. We had curious eyes trained on us from all manner of distances. I wasn’t really used to this kind of attention, so it felt kinda weird.

My party was made up of me, Yumina, Elze, Linze, and Yae. I also brought Kohaku along with us, just because.

“You seem fine with the stares, Yumina.”

“I’m used to being gawked at during castle parties and the like. In my case, I’m actually relieved, as none of them know who I really am.”

Yeah, I guess that tracks. A princess would be used to being the center of attention... Even so, though, it’s kinda weird being so blatantly looked at.

Also, it felt like the way they were looking at me was different from the way they were looking at the girls.

“Tsk. Buddying up with a buncha chicks, huh?”

“What a freakin’ playboy. He’s rubbin’ it in our faces too!”

“Curse you... Curse you... A curse on your family...”

...Oops. Don’t think I was supposed to pick up any of that. But hey, I guess it’s not aggression they’re sending my way. It’s envy. I do get it, though. They’re all totally cute... No, I shouldn’t say anything. I feel like if I do, the ambient anger they feel would only grow.

“Haaah...”

“Something wrong, my liege?”

“Nah, don’t worry about it.”

I waved away Kohaku’s concerns, then suddenly noticed a woman walking up toward a nearby stage. A guild representative, perhaps? The woman motioned to clear her throat before conjuring up a small

magical circle next to her mouth. Then, a larger magical circle appeared in the air, aimed toward us. I had no idea what I was looking at.

“Attention, everyone! I’m about to explain the contest!”

The magic circle in the air reverberated and projected her voice outward.

What the hell is this?!

“My name is Odette! I work with the adventurer’s guild! By the way, I’m speaking to you through a Null spell known as **[Speaker]**! It’s perfectly safe, so don’t be alarmed!”

[Speaker]? A Null spell that amplified sound? Sounded handy. Definitely the right kind of magic a public-facing official should have, for sure. That said, her volume and excitement levels were dialed up just a little too much for my liking.

“Now, let’s get this show on the road! Our first trial is the scavenger hunt!”

Huh? Scavenging? For what?

“In this portion of the contest, you’ll be charged with hunting down specific magical beasts! We’ll determine your target by drawing random lots! It’s a competition that requires you to track and hunt with precision!”

Isn’t that more suited for hunters?! Wait, no...I guess this falls into an adventuring skill set too.

“All the beasts we want you to hunt live in Viyella Forest, which is only about an hour’s walk south from here! Not many of them are dangerous either! It should be an easy hunt... However! The time limit is two hours, so you won’t make it in time if you just head there and back on foot! Oh, and you’re not allowed to take horses or vehicles either! Now, come on down, party representatives! Draw

your lot and find out which monster you're tasked with hunting down!"

Once Odette's explanation finished, the adventurers around me roared and charged toward the ticket booth.

"Lone-horned Wolf! Sweet!"

"Ugh... A Crystal Deer?!"

"W-Wait, aren't crimson bats nocturnal?!"

The contestants fanned out and left the square. Some were happy, while others seemed disappointed. One thing I noticed was that only one or two members of each party were actually leaving. That kind of made sense, since you didn't exactly need a full party to hunt most of these things. I did notice a handful of full groups that left together, though. They were probably either lower-ranked adventurers or groups that wanted to split up in order to cover more ground.

Getting to the forest and finding your prey in a timely manner was key to this whole operation. In that sense, it seemed like this part of the contest was a test of endurance and observation, which were two vital skills for any adventurer.

Oh yeah, I gotta draw my lot.

I was the party representative, so I walked over to the box and pulled out a card with my target's name on it.

"A Saber-toothed Jaguar, huh? That works for me."

As the name suggested, Saber-toothed Jaguars were jaguars with long and sharp canine teeth. They were large, but they weren't particularly dangerous animals. The guild regularly asked for their teeth as part of their regular quest cycle too.

"Which one of us will go, which one?"

“I’ll do it. I’ve been to that forest a few times already.”

I opened up a **[Gate]** to Viyella Forest, rendering my destination but a short step away.

“Wait, you can do that?!”

“None of the rules said I couldn’t use magic. Just no vehicles or horses, right? Anyway, I’m heading out now.”

It wasn’t against the rules, so I had no issue making use of my available skills. The stupefied guild officials could say nothing as they watched me hop through my portal.

◇ ◇ ◇

“Whoaaaaaaa! First one back is Team Brunhild! That’s the Dragonslayer’s party, everyone! It’s barely even been ten minutes! Talk about a sneaky and cunning display!”

Gimme a break. You should’ve specified that I couldn’t use my magic!

That reminded me, I’d heard there were a few other people in the world who could use transfer spells similar to mine. None of them seemed to be in Belfast, though.

I handed the jaguar fangs to a nearby guild official. They appraised them and determined that it was indeed from a fresh kill.

“Good work out there, Touya.”

“It was hardly work, really.”

I couldn’t help but let out a sarcastic chuckle upon hearing Yumina’s comment. I felt a little bad, since I hadn’t actually used any of my adventuring skills to secure first place. I’d just used a little bit of my powerful magic... Still, it was the guild’s fault for not banning that magic to begin with.

They were, in fact, treasure chests. Of various sizes too! And they were all lined up in a row on the stage.

“Now then, it’s time for our second trial! The chestpicking challenge!”

Odette’s voice rang out across the nearby area.

...Like lockpicking? We’ve gotta open those things?

“Adventurers often come across treasure chests in dungeons, ruins, and bandit strongholds! This trial is all about opening said chests safely and efficiently! Show us that you’ve got what it takes!”

That made sense. Sometimes, we came across treasure chests on our adventures. Some of them were unlocked, while others had locks so rusty that they barely worked or you could just bash them off. Unfortunately, we hadn’t actually come across many locked chests, so none of us were particularly skilled at lockpicking.

“By the by, some of our treasure chests are rigged with traps! If you’re judged to have triggered one, you’ll be immediately disqualified from this trial and net your party a whopping zero points! The traps vary in difficulty too! Some are easy to disarm, while some are extremely difficult! Oh, and some of the chests are mimics!”

What?! Mimics?! Aren’t those dangerous monsters that disguise themselves as chests and eat adventurers?! Is it really okay to have those things involved in a guild event?!

“Participation order will be determined by drawing lots. Party representatives, please make your way over to our boxes. We’ve also prepared lockpicking tools in case you don’t have your own. If you require anything else, please let us know!”

One of the nearby guild representatives had set up a desk with various thin tools atop it. One of them had a little shield attached to

it at the base, which I thought was strange. I had no idea what that was for.

“Some chests are rigged to fire out projectiles like poisoned arrows, either from secret openings or the keyhole itself. The little shield prevents them from hitting you,” Linze answered as if reading my mind.

That made sense to me. Other common traps included gas, acid coating, or explosives that would destroy the contents.

“So, uh, who’s gonna go? Since it’s an official guild event, I doubt anything deadly’s gonna happen...”

I was mildly concerned about those mimics, though. Still, the girls had already decided I couldn’t go up as a representative a second time, so it had to be one of them.

“It is my turn, it is.”

“Huh?”

We all blinked in confusion as the unexpected volunteer raised her voice.

“Must you react that way, must you? I am an adventurer. I know well enough how to open a treasure chest, I do.”

“Oh, no. Of course. Go right ahead.”

Yae stood up and walked over to draw her lot. I hadn’t expected this. I really hadn’t expected this at all.

“Will she be all right? I don’t mean to be rude, but Yae isn’t exactly the first person I would’ve thought of. She’s not exactly the delicate sort.”

Yumina had gotten close enough to Yae to say that, but she still sounded a little harsh. It was true that Yae was kind of clumsy and more of a powerhouse than someone with a delicate touch, since

she didn't exactly care about finesse... If anything, she was more suited for whatever the opposite of lockpicking was. But still, she'd volunteered, so I had to assume she had some sort of plan.

I looked over at the stage and saw that multiple parties had already disarmed their traps. Each chest they'd opened had a crystal ball inside. Each of those crystal balls had a number displayed inside them, which was apparently some kind of countdown timer that froze once the chest was opened. In other words, the less time it took for a person to open the chest, the higher their score.

"Oh, Touya. Yae's up," Linze said as she pointed over to Yae, who was now on the stage. The treasure chest she'd chosen sat in front of her. I wondered if she'd chosen it for any particular reason.

It was at that exact moment that I noticed Yae didn't have any lockpicking tools on her.

...Wait, how's she gonna open the...? Oh. Oh no.

Yae suddenly brandished the blade that sat at her waist.

She's not gonna do that, is she?!

Yae held her sword aloft and suddenly fell as still as she possibly could.

"Haaaaaah!"

Her sword arced downward with incredible momentum, cutting through the lock like a knife through butter... However, her gleaming blade didn't stop there. Yae's excessive force sent her attack sailing through the chest itself, cleaving the entire thing in half.



“Ah...” Yae mumbled as she suddenly turned her head to face us. The look on her face said it all. I could do nothing but bury my face in the palms of my hands.

“I am truly sorry, I am...” Yae muttered quietly. She’d cut the treasure chest so cleanly in two that the crystal ball inside had been bisected.

“I had planned to stop once I broke the keyhole, I had...”

I knew that much. She clearly only wanted to cut the lock open... I knew it, and yet...

“Why didn’t you slash at the edges of the chest? It would’ve been fine then.”

“Ah... That would have been a great idea, it would!” Yae exclaimed as she clapped her hands together at Linze’s comment. I wasn’t so sure she wouldn’t mess that up either, though.

Well, whatever. Not like anyone else in our party could’ve opened it up the proper way.

Whenever we found treasure chests in dungeons, I just crammed it into **[Storage]** and brought it back to town for a pro to open.

With nothing else to do, we watched the other parties unlock their chests and gain their points. Our team, Brunhild, scored zero points this time around, so we fell from our top position pretty rapidly. Though thankfully, we’d scored so well in the first round that we were still hanging around in the middle of the leaderboard.

“See? It’ll be fine. We’ve still got plenty of chances to turn things around.”

I tried cheering up Yae when suddenly, Odette appeared on the stage to make her next announcement.

“It’s time for the third trial, everyone! Sense or senseless? It’s the Adventurer Quiz! Gain points for correct answers! Easy peasy!”

Sense? So I guess this one’s a test of an adventurer’s common knowledge?

“However! To answer the questions, you have to find them! We’ve scattered the question sheets in sealed letters all over the city. Find them and bring them back so we can open them! We won’t accept any with broken wax seals, though!”

Odette wiggled a blue envelope that had been clearly sealed with wax. Color aside, it was easily recognizable as the seal had the guild’s crest on it. I wondered if there was a question inside that one as well.

Apparently, the questions varied in terms of difficulty. Points were awarded for correct answers, but deducted for wrong answers. You could try answering different questions until you had five wrong answers or five correct answers. In other words, you had a maximum of nine questions you could answer. Assuming you found nine envelopes, of course.

“Magic is prohibited during this trial. If you see an envelope up high, you’ll have to climb! We’ve got a two-hour time limit too! Let’s go!”

Odette signaled the start of the third round, sending the adventurers scattering off in various directions.

Wow, it’s like watching baby spiders spill out of an egg clutch.

“Let’s get going. Shall we split up?”

“Sounds wise, yeah. It would be a lot faster.”

“Okay. You all go in pairs. I’ll take Kohaku.”

Yumina went with Yae, while Elze went with Linze. Then, we fanned out across the city in search of our spoils. I headed west, away from the square in the southern ward. The east side had a ton of venues

for entertainment, which meant a lot of people. I didn't want to have to sift through crowds in my search.

"Tch... Where to find them...? If only I could use my spells..."

《My liege, look.》

Kohaku signaled upward, pointing out a blue envelope stuck to a chimney jutting out of a house's roof.

Yup. That's a guild envelope all right. They really put one up there? It's easy to see, but it'll be a pain in the ass actually getting there.

I instinctively moved to cast **[Gate]**, but stopped myself a second into the incantation.

Whoops! Can't use magic. Forgot it was against the rules.

"What a pain..." I mumbled as I clambered up a nearby fence, hopped onto the roof, and grabbed the envelope.

Once I returned to the square with it, there were already a bunch of adventurers with envelopes of their own lined up.

Damn, I'm late.

I took my place in line, and soon enough, it was time for the woman in front of me to try her luck. She brought her envelope to the guild staffer, who was an older-looking gentleman.

"Please answer in the designated time frame. This question is only for her, so none of you in line may try to answer."

The man nodded sternly as he spoke. He had a small ring with an hourglass set into it, presumably to time the answers. He quickly unsealed the envelope and cleared his throat before reading out the question.

"Now...answer the following question. What material is most precious on a Lone-horned Wolf?"

“Uhm...th-the horn?”

“Correct. Congratulations.”

The man smiled as the girl’s shoulders relaxed. He then drew a little circle on her question card, made a note of her party name, and set it in a nearby box.

That was a pretty easy one. Hell, even I know that!

The girl happily skipped back to her party, which meant it was my turn next. I cautiously handed my envelope over to the man.

“Now...answer the following question. What was the weapon of choice wielded by Buckram the Legendary Dragonslayer?”

“What?!”

Who the hell is Buckram?! What?! Huh?! Weapon of choice? Like a sword or a spear or something?! I dunno! Uh...

My anxiety spiked as I watched the sand in that hourglass trickle away.

Dammit! I’m gonna run out of time! I need to shoot my shot!

“S-Sword!”

“Bzzt. Wrong answer.”

The man drew a cross on my card and dropped it into a nearby box.

“The correct answer was battle-axe. Next.”

I dejectedly slinked away from the counter, not wanting to get in the way of the people behind me.

Dammit... How was I supposed to know that one? I barely know anything about this world’s history... Fine! Another one! I don’t have time to waste anymore!

Kohaku and I rushed back out into town to grab another envelope.

“Answer the following question. What’s the price for the full course treatment at the Blooming Nectar Brothel near the adventurer’s guild in town?”

“I don’t know!”

I knew I was venting my frustration, but I couldn’t help but yell at the young guild worker in front of me. I was angry because all of my questions so far had been ridiculously difficult. Well, it wasn’t that they were hard. They were just questions that I had no chance of knowing the answers to.

“How many guild branches exist in the Kingdom of Belfast?”

“Between flamewheel grass, moonbeam grass, and royalspark grass...which is the most valuable?”

How was I supposed to know either of those? Well...the second one seemed more reasonable, but still!

Everyone else in my party had long since answered all five of their questions correctly, so now I was stuck canceling out their hard efforts by getting everything wrong. If I had more multiple-choice questions, it would’ve been a lot better, but I had no such luck. The time limit was almost over, and I was just about done.

I guess that makes me the least knowledgeable person here? But that’s understandable! I’m from another world! AUGH, whatever! Let’s do the next one!

I ran out of the square on the hunt for another envelope.

Envelope... Envelope... Envelooooooooope?

Just as I was about to break out into a full-on sprint to find any remaining envelopes, I caught sight of a white animal running toward me.

“Kohaku?!”

The little tiger cub was making a direct beeline for me, carrying a blue envelope between two sets of sharp teeth.

《My liege, I found one!》

“Oooh! Nice job, Kohaku!”

Technically, Kohaku was a summoned beast, so I didn’t know if that violated the magic rule or not...but I hadn’t actually used the summoning spell during the quest itself, so it was probably fine. Maybe.

I took the envelope from Kohaku and ran straight back to the square. Once I got there, I handed the envelope to the guild official, the young man who I’d yelled at on the last question. This was my last shot. I wanted to avoid answering five questions wrong in a row... If I could just get one right, I’d reclaim a little personal pride.

The man pulled the card out from the envelope.

“Oh! It’s a bonus card! If you answer correctly, it’s worth three points! And it’s such an easy question too!”

Wait, really?! Awesome! Wait, though...if I get it right, won’t I still be at -1 for points? Dammit! Then again, given the current state of things, maybe I should just count my blessings and cut my losses... Yeah, this is fine. I can get this right and bring myself back from negative four. I’ll reclaim a little dignity!

“Now then, answer the following question. What is the King of Belfast’s full name?”

“Ah...”

My blood ran cold.

The king’s name? Uh...? Uhhh... W-Wait, it was uh... Uhhh! I can picture his face. I know his face! I see him every couple of days! But I always say Your Majesty or King Belfast! Yumina’s full name is Yumina Urnea Belfast, right? So then, isn’t the latter part of his name

Urnea Belfast? Wait, no. Urnea is only for women in their family! For men it's... Urnes! Right! Duke Ortlinde had that in his surname! Urnes Belfast! So wait, then, what's his given name?!

"I'm sure it's... Tr... Tris...? Triscuit? Trist...blyn? No... Wyn?"

"Speak up, please."

"Trist...wyn Urnes... Belfast?"

"..."

H-Hey. Don't keep me in the dark here! Tell me!

"That's right! Three points!"

Just as the man congratulated me, I heard Odette's shrill whistle ring out over the **[Speaker]**. The trial had seemingly come to an end. The man circled my card, made a note of the party name, and put it in the box. I'd actually gotten one right...

But man, uh...he's gonna be my father-in-law, so I should've known his name! I'll have to reflect on that a bit...

In the end, I had negative one point, Yumina and Linze got five each, while Elze and Yae got three each. That meant we got fifteen in total, which was an average of three per person. Not bad at all. If only I hadn't reduced the average so terribly.

Our rank wasn't all that high after the third trial, unfortunately. It was still a little above the middle of the board, however.

"It was harder than I thought... I guess we've only been adventurers for about a year, so there's no helping it."

"It's just a reminder of how far we still have to go! We'll keep giving it our best! There's still time to win the contest back!"

Yumina smiled as if to encourage Elze, who seemed slightly downcast. She was right. This was a critical point for us to earn our top spot back.

“It’s a little past noon, everyone, so we’ll take a lunch break! Worry not, we’ve prepared food for the lot of you. Send a representative over to pick it up!”

Oh, they’re providing lunch? That’s a relief. What a generous guild they are... Wait, no...they charged us to participate, so this is the least they could do.

We took our meal from the guild and started to eat. The meal itself was a large bowl of soup that I hadn’t bothered to ask anything about. There were a lot of veggies in there, along with pork-like meat.

“This is quite nice!”

It was a pretty rustic meal, not exactly the kind of thing you’d have in a restaurant, but I couldn’t complain about the taste.

I wonder what kinda meat it is... Probably monster, right?

As I chowed down on a hunk of dubiously sourced yet delicious meat, Odette began to speak from the stage once more.

“Now, everyone. We all know any good adventurer needs to have a handle on cookery. That’s why we’re going to have you cook a meal with randomly provided tools and ingredients. That’s right! The fourth trial is a Creative Cuisine Cookoff!”

Huh, so that’s what’s next?

We drew lots and ended up getting assigned ingredients and utensils randomly based on them. Our team ended up getting a well-balanced assortment of meat and veggies. As for cooking utensils, we had a saucepan and a kitchen knife. Certainly a versatile and easy set to work with, that was for sure. And yet...

“This is bad...”

“Yup.”

We used **[Gate]** to go wherever we wanted, so we went out and did a lot of day trips. However, due to the convenience of that spell, we ate at home instead of out on the field while adventuring. And because of my **[Storage]** keeping foodstuff fresh and hot, I never cooked. I could just cast a spell to produce a hot meal any time, any place.

Plus, it wasn't just me who struggled in that department either. Yumina was a princess, so she had little in the way of practical cooking experience. Yae was good at eating, but that didn't translate to being good at cooking. Her only hobby was swordplay. That only left Elze and Linze...

"If it's come to this, I'll have to do it..."

"No! Sister, don't do it!"

Elze rolled up her sleeves and moved to pick up the knife, but Linze suddenly tackled her out of the way.

Hm? It's rare to see Linze yell.

"It's fine, just let me do it..."

"No, I can handle it! You wash the veggies, okay?"

"Hrm..." Elze grumbled, but followed Linze's lead and began cleaning the vegetables.

Linze really didn't want Elze to cook for some reason. I couldn't help but lean in and ask why.

"...Is she that bad a cook?"

"She can cook things, but it's very specific and not for everyone. I don't think you'd appreciate it very much."

Specific, huh? She has a unique style or something? Guess it's for the best that she doesn't participate this time, then. For this trial, we're gonna want to have as broad an appeal as possible.

I didn't want to risk us losing points, since our judge could end up hating whatever it was Elze was thinking of. It wasn't a worthwhile hill to die on.

Linze began to hurriedly prepare the various ingredients. She used our limited selection of meat and veggies to create a simple, yet elegant, stir-fry. Then, she made a veggie soup with the leftovers. I tried a spoonful, and it was pretty darn nice. It wasn't exactly fine dining, but I couldn't imagine camping adventurers complaining about it at all.

One by one, the guild staffers came around to try every party's food. They enjoyed certain meals, while others made them turn various shades of green.

...Sheesh, that bad?

Our food didn't stand out, negatively or positively. We didn't rank very high compared to most of our competitors. Nobody on our team said anything about it, though. Linze had tried her best, and it was better than anything any of us could come up with.

"Now comes the final trial! The most important skill for any budding adventurer! Crisis prevention! Your ability to assess risk and avoid danger! Can't adventure if you're dead, right? Survival ranks above all else!"

Oh... That's definitely true. Adventuring is risky work, and if you don't have good crisis prevention skills, you could definitely die.

"Take a look over here!" Odette exclaimed as she pointed at a large board that had been brought up onto the stage. There was a map on it. A map of the capital city we were in, in fact. Though, there was some kind of line drawn out that weaved through the streets in a loop.

Is it a race? The line goes through a lot of back alleys...

“The final challenge is an obstacle course! The faster you get through it and loop back, the more points you get! But be warned, traps and other dangers await you along the way... Should you fall victim to any of them, you’ll have points deducted. And if you go off course, you’ll be disqualified!”

So it’s an obstacle course... Don’t like the sound of there being traps, though. I wonder what kinds they’ll have?

The roads had all been sealed off from the general public, and given how much of the city we were using, that was no small feat... The guild clearly wielded more influence than I’d thought.

“Should we take it slow and steady?”

“But if we do that, won’t we fall behind everyone else?”

“If you rush, you are more likely to fall into a trap, you are.”

“Hmm, this is difficult...”

It’d be bad if we were too slow, but it’d probably be bad if we were too fast as well. The best course of action was probably to stay in the middle, and move to overtake when possible.

“By the way, no magic can be used to get past the traps! Specifically, we’re banning teleportation magic and magic that obstructs your competition directly or causes damage to the town! Other magic is fine, but usage of any of those types is grounds for immediate disqualification!”

Tch! I bet she added that rule just for me. And here I thought I could’ve been a little sneaky too...

“Let’s just stick together and move as a group. If anything happens, we’ll be able to help each other.”

“You’re right. Let’s move at a steady pace, while keeping aware of our surroundings.”

Yumina nodded. The course itself wasn't all that long. If we jogged along it, we'd be at the goal in twenty minutes or less. The only issue was the traps.

The adventurers gathered at the start line. A large number of them had removed their armor, obviously trying to lighten their loads. We moved back from the front of the group and nestled ourselves in around the middle. I didn't want to charge out in front and get taken out immediately.

"Now begins the final trial, the Obstacle Trap Race! Go!"

Odette signaled the start of the race, so we all sped forward. It started on a straight road, then went down a main street. It was hard to see past the adventurers in front of us, but I couldn't see anything out of the ordinary...

"Whoa!"

"Bwaaah!"

"W-Wait! Hwaaah?!"

The sudden cries caused a lot of people to stop dead in their tracks. I had no idea what was going on, so I peeked over and saw about ten adventurers ahead of us in a muddy pit.

"Dammit! A slick trap! We're covered!"

The pit must have been dug out with Earth magic, while the sides of it had been reinforced to prevent it from collapsing earlier. The mud was probably at the bottom to cushion the fall. I was glad my intuition about not charging ahead recklessly was on the mark.

Everyone who was still clean ran around the pitfall and continued onward. It was a little cruel to leave them there, but this was a competition. We couldn't afford mercy.

"We should definitely proceed carefully..."

“I know, but we can’t afford to be too slow...”

Just as I was about to reply to Yumina and tell her we needed to speed things up, a nearby adventurer got his foot caught in a snare trap and screamed as he got pulled up, hanging by his leg from a tree branch.

“...Let’s be careful, yeah.”

The adventurer in front of us turned a corner. We turned it as well, only to find him flat on his back, rolling around in pain.

“Gwabgh?!”

There was some kind of liquid underneath him. Apparently, he’d stepped right into it and fallen down. I squinted, wondering if it was oil, but quickly realized it wasn’t. It looked more slippery than that.

We avoided the shimmering, slippery liquid and proceeded onward. I wasn’t exactly fond of the idea of traps being right around the corner. If that adventurer hadn’t been there, that could’ve easily been one of us.

“What?!”

Another adventurer behind us charged around the corner and slipped on the slime, landing right next to the other guy. Truly a fearsome trap...

We passed the slippery pathway and came to a long stone bridge, only to witness a massive explosion that sent a group in front of us tumbling into the river below.

Whaaat?!

“I-It’s a minefield?!”

“Don’t worry, contestants! It may be loud and powerful, but your safety is guaranteed! Run on in and relax!”

“How am I supposed to relax when there are explosives under my feet?!”

Odette’s disembodied voice did little to settle my nerves. Another adventurer charged across the bridge, giving me a clear look at the magic circle that formed beneath his feet before it detonated and sent him flying into the water.

“Ah... It’s an explosive sound, and there’s smoke...but it’s not actually an **[Explosion]** spell. It’s actually Wind magic that’s similar to **[Cyclone]**. That’s definitely safer. It seems like it’s designed to carry the people who trigger it into the water.”

“...Even if it’s safer, it doesn’t sound fun.”

Linze’s explanation didn’t reassure me very much. Even if it wasn’t going to kill me, I didn’t want to step on a magic mine. Plus, falling into the river meant you went off the course, which equaled instant disqualification!

“Is there a way to tell where the mines are?” I mumbled to myself as I crouched down and scanned my eyes over the bridge.

...I got nothing. I thought there’d be marks or something, but I don’t see a thing.

“Touya-dono! Look!”

“Hm?”

Yae pointed at another party who’d started moving across the bridge, but this group was walking along the parapet edges instead of the main bridge itself.

Damn, that’s smart!

The parapet was too narrow for more than one person to traverse at a time, and before I’d even noticed it, a line had started to form at the sides.

“Ugh. We need to line up too!”

No, wait...if we join the line now, won't it be too late? How do we do this? Wait... No, I get it. All we have to do is not step on the main part of the bridge, right?

“Rumble forth, Earth! Pulverizing Boulder: [Rock Crash]!”

I cast a bunch of Earth magic atop the bridge, causing a series of basketball-sized rocks to fall onto it, detonating a ton of the mines in the process. It was okay to use because it didn't cause any damage to the town.

A few of the rocks had blown away, but the ones that remained could now be used as safe stepping-stones to the other side.

Hell yeah! Let's go!

“Amazing. We can cross now!”

“Great work, Touya!”

Elze charged ahead and leapfrogged her way across the bridge, the rest of us following suit shortly after. The people who were crossing via the parapet were struggling to keep their balance, but there was no way for them to turn back or escape.

We kept going as fast as we could, running ahead after coming down from our stepping-stones. We made it past net traps, gust traps, and even a trap that was just a bunch of food laid out enticingly for us to eat. Then, before we knew it, we were in the lead. It was dangerous being this far ahead, but we had to forge on.

“We will win if we keep this up, we will!”

I nodded over to Yae. We couldn't afford to drop our guard, however. There could always have been an unexpected twist up ahead, which was usually how things worked with races like this.

Another bridge stood before us. It was different from the one we'd passed earlier, but it ran over the same river.

"Is it another minefield?"

"I don't know, but let's not waste any time. We'll cross the same way as before."

I cast **[Rock Crash]** again and dropped a bunch of rocks down on the bridge. Apparently, this was another minefield, as some of the rocks blew up on impact. The girls went on ahead, hopping from stone to stone. I went last, using my Brunhild's **[Explosion]** bullets to blow up the rocks behind me.

Fortunately, I couldn't see anyone behind us, but I didn't want to give them any chances. Thus, breaking the stones was the rational choice.

"Hm?"

I glanced to the side and saw a little cat walking along the bridge's parapet.

...Uhhh, why's there a cat here? Wait! Hey, kitty! Don't jump down there, that's a minefield!

"Stop!"

My body instinctively moved to rescue the kitty cat. I jumped from my rock and caught the cat before it made contact with the bridge. Then, I tossed the kitten to Yae, who was just a little bit in front of us...but it was too late for me. The magic circle was already beginning to form at my feet.

"Bwahaaah?!"

"Touya-dono?!"

"Touya?!"

The explosion went off, the wind took me upward, and I tumbled over the parapet and into the waters below...



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“And the winner is... Team Silverwind!”

A cheer resounded across the plaza. I sat there, soaking wet, slowly clapping my hands. My expression was blank.

“Dammit...”

“There is no helping it, there is not.”

“I’m sorry, guys. I messed it all up.”

“No, it’s not your fault Touya.”

“It was just bad luck.”

A single point. We lost by a single point. I was disqualified, but everyone else finished, bringing us rocketing up the scoreboard...to second place. If I’d finished as well, we would’ve come out on top. If I just hadn’t fallen in the river, even with my point reduction, I could’ve won it for us. It was so frustrating to think about.

“At least we got a runner-up prize. No fancy armor, but five platinum coins is nothing to sniff at!”

Elze grinned and proudly puffed her chest out. I wondered if she was just trying to console me. The runner-up prize was pretty nice, though. Five platinum coins was equivalent to five million yen. That was a million for each of us, no small sum at all.

I nodded quietly as I clutched the money purse close. Spending this would make me feel better, at least.

“Let’s use this money to buy some gifts and souvenirs to help us remember today!”

“That sounds wise! I shall use my money to buy some wonderful ingredients for Crea-dono to cook with, I shall!”

...That's not really a souvenir, Yae. Kinda sounds like an excuse to fill your stomach, if anything... I won't say that out loud, though.

"I think I'll buy some cute clothes for Renne..."

...Elze, do you wanna buy some cute clothes for yourself too? You don't have to use her as an excuse, you know?

"I'd like to buy some accessories for Lapis and Cecile."

"I'll buy a timepiece for Laim."

Linze and Yumina brought up their own suggestions.

Maybe I should buy our workers some sun hats, or some trinkets...? Wait, no. I've got a million yen here! I should treat them!

I decided to buy a set of new gardening tools for Julio, and a new set of armor for our gatekeepers, Tom and Huck.

"Let's get to shopping, then."

I started to walk down the street, only for Yumina and Kohaku to flank my sides.

"I had a lot of fun today! We should participate in more events like this sometime!"

"Yeah, we should."

Yumina smiled at me, and I smiled right back. Seeing everyone happy made me glad we'd decided to do it. It was fun to do this kind of thing once in a while, so I made a mental note to do it again.

With happy feelings in our hearts, we walked through the streets of the capital.

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"Is something on your mind, Touya? You've been smiling like an idiot all morning..." Elze asked as she suddenly raised a brow from across the breakfast table.

...Like an idiot? Rude!

“Oh, I just had a dream about when we still lived in Belfast’s capital. It was kind of nostalgic.”

“You had a nostalgic dream, you did?”

“Mhm. It was about when we took part in the adventurer’s guild contest in Belfast.”

“Ohhh! I remember that! Living in Belfast, gosh... That was so long ago now.”

Yumina smiled and clapped her hands together as the memories came back to her. It was back before I’d even met Lu, Hilde, or Sakura. We’d certainly been through a lot, before and after that time.

“You took part in one of the guild’s adventuring contests? Wow... Did you win, dad?” Linne asked in a curious tone, confirming that the guild was still operating contests in the future.

“We didn’t win, unfortunately...”

“At the very last stretch, Touya... Well...”

Linze’s remark was enough for me, but then Elze had to go and elaborate.

Wait! Don’t talk about my failures in front of my kids!

“I want to hear about how it went.”

“Indeed. I’d also like to know more.”

Lu and Hilde wanted to hear about it. Sakura, Sue, and Leen were all leaning in curiously...as were my children.

...I shouldn’t have mentioned it.

Elze and the others started to tell the story, and I simply carried on eating my breakfast. Watching them excitedly reminisce and chatter, I couldn't help but smile.



Chapter I: Fatherly Bonds

The Kingdom of Curelia was found on the eastern edge of the western continent, bordering the Allent Theocracy. The kingdom's location on the easternmost part of the continent and the long mountain range that separated it from Allent and Langeais meant that it was fairly isolated and could only trade with Panaches through the occasional airship.

However, with the introduction of the eastern continent, Curelia soon found new trading partners in Refreese, Belfast, and Mismede. They'd suddenly found themselves with new points of avenue across the sea, not so far away. It was a surprise, to be sure, but a welcome one indeed. They could export their magical engineering tools and Golems, while importing magic artifacts and knowledge of spells. There was also, of course, an influx of new culture, art, and food that they'd never seen before.

Curelia had found itself plunged headfirst into a new era of booming commerce. And because so many exotic goods were now centered in Curelia, merchants from all over the western continent were willing to brave the mountains to find them. By doing nothing more than moving goods from east to west, Curelia built up gradual prosperity in the wake of the two united worlds. The many merchants of Curelia built great ships and set sail for the eastern shores, dreaming of success. The sea that separated the two continents was fraught with danger, and had no shortage of gigantic beasts...but even that risk did not deter the noble dreamers. Some of those ships met ill fates, ending up as wreckage beneath the waves...but they still set sail.

The coastal city of Alpris was one such bustling hub from which enterprising merchants set out. And yet, that port town was now caught in the throes of disorder and chaos.

The people who lived by the docks had found themselves under attack by hideous half-fish creatures that emerged from the briny deep. The threat came from more than just the creatures, though. They were accompanied by quadruple-armed, slender Golems and Rock Giants that stood as high as four meters tall.

The Fishmen attacked any humans they saw, the four-armed Golems set anything flammable ablaze, and the Rock Giants simply crushed and smashed any structures in their path.

A flourishing settlement had been reduced to a burning nightmare in the span of a night. The guard Golems and knights posted to Alpris tried their best to fend off the attackers while getting the townspeople to safety...but the fire and wreckage meant that no matter what, the town itself would surely be lost. Amid the burning chaos, people could do nothing but let out screams of fear and despair.

A figure stood atop a nearby bell tower, looking down at the carnage.

"Nice, very nice. Hot flames, crumbling buildings, and echoing wails of death. It's very nice indeed!"

The figure was a young man with ashen hair. The lower half of his face was covered by an iron mask, but his eyes were clearly lit up with amusement. It was obvious that the view of the ruined port town was bringing him nothing but joy.

The boy was dressed like your typical adventurer. He had a purple-blue cloak on his back, and a peculiar spear in his hand. The spear was an eerie metallic-purple, with the freaky design of a glaring eyeball resting on the butt end.

"Come, Wistaria. It's time for your feast," the boy said as he hefted his spear aloft. Then, a strange black mist rose from the town below...and got sucked up into the spear itself.

This black mist came from the bodies of the fleeing townsfolk, rising out of them and funneling up toward the spear. Nobody down there could see it, of course, but every person it came out of fell down on the spot, no longer able to move. They were still alive, but their eyes had lost all vigor.

The metallic-purple spear, Wistaria, shone with a brilliant luster as it absorbed the miasma from the people below...and as it moved one step further toward fulfilling its purpose as a wicked vessel.

“All righty, let’s see!”

As he spoke, the boy twirled his spear in the air. Seconds later, countless lightning bolts lurched from its tip, raining down on every ship anchored in the harbor below. They were blown to smithereens almost instantly.

“Ka ha ha ha ha! What a blast! I should do this some more. How about...?”

“Are you still playing around, Orchid? It’s time for us to leave.”

Before the boy could choose his next target, a man in a diving helmet appeared from behind him, a metallic-blue hatchet hanging at his waist.

“What’s the deal, Indigo? Why do we gotta leave?”

“Our objective isn’t destroying the town. It’s harvesting negative emotion.”

“Yeah, I know that! Take a good look, I sucked up plenty!” Orchid exclaimed as he wagged his spear around, showing off its new sheen.

The black mist the spear had sucked up contained the negative feelings of the people in the town. Or, to be more specific, it was their terror and fear.

Of all the negative emotions like anger, hatred, sadness, or emotional pain...it was fear that was the easiest to harvest from others. It was an emotion that came from man's most basic self-preservation instincts, an emotion that could easily dominate one's mind entirely if pushed into the right situation. And a person whose feelings were consumed by a wicked vessel became a living corpse. If you lost your feelings, you lost your soul, and you'd be nothing more than a husk of a person.

"I can't say I'm fond of this method of collection, Orchid."

"Well, it's a whole lot faster than getting people hooked on drugs, isn't it? Your way of doing things is such a hassle, Indigo."

"My method increases the purity of the emotions I harvest, Orchid. This momentary fear you inspire in people isn't nearly as profound. It's better to slowly build up negativity, anxiety, and dependency in our victims over time. That way, their despair is far purer and far higher in quality."

"Tsk... Yeah, yeah."

Orchid clearly didn't care to hear what Indigo was saying. He found the man's explanations far too preachy, which might've been appropriate, since Indigo used to be a priest.

"If you've gotten what you need, then we need to leave at once. If the knights come in from the capital and we're still here, things will become needlessly complicated."

"Yeah, guess I agree that'd be a pain in the ass. But it could be fun, y'know?"

"No matter how strong you and I are, we're not ready to take on a nation's army. Not yet, at least."

"Tsk. Man, you're such a stick-in-the-mud."

Foamy blue waves appeared beneath the two men, and then they sank into the magical waters at their feet, disappearing in a flash.

As if sensing the absence, the Fishmen, Rock Giants, and Golems stopped their attack and turned back to the sea. It was later found that some of the wounded townspeople had vanished into the sea as well, after taking on appearances similar to the Fishmen.

The town of Alpris was wiped off the map that day. There were only a few adventurer's guilds on the western continent, and even though Curelia had a good relationship with the eastern continent...they did not have a guild branch, nor did they have a representative on the world stage. Thus, it took some time for this information to reach the rest of the world.

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"A concert hall?"

"Yes, we can invite traveling minstrels, poets, and musicians to perform there. You could consider it a kind of entertainment facility for those passing through Brunhild."

"Hm... Sounds interesting enough."

Kousaka seemed to be on board with Sakura's proposal. She had a point, since the only venues for music right now were taverns or the central park. Taverns were fun because they felt like a live music venue with food and drink, but inviting guests from other countries to them was a bit awkward.

Kousaka immediately went off to find Naito and plan out the construction road map. They were both working as hard as ever. I appreciated their support, but I didn't think I'd seen either of them ever take a vacation... At the very least, I knew I'd have to force some time off on Kousaka at some point.

"But why this idea for a concert hall all of a sudden?"

“Yoshino said... She said one exists in the future...and that she and I perform there together.”

...Wait, that's why you brought it up? I guess Yoshino leaked some more spoilers. Still, if we're gonna have one eventually anyway, there's no harm in building it now.

In a real speak-of-the-devil kind of moment, Yoshino suddenly appeared out of nowhere in my office. I'd told her not to brazenly use **[Teleport]** like that, but she still did it anyway.

“Father! Mother! Look at this! It's from Doctor Babylon!” Yoshino exclaimed as she held out something in front of her. It was a guitar, but smaller. Kind of like a child-sized guitar, or something. What surprised me the most was that it appeared to be an electric guitar...or, more specifically, a Stratocaster.

Sakura had bought a bunch of books on music theory from Earth when we were on our honeymoon. She'd bought a handful of actual instruments too...so had Doc Babylon used those things as reference materials to create this, perhaps?

Yoshino started to play the guitar with a pick, and the sound rang out loud through the whole office even though there wasn't a connected amplifier. In other words, this wasn't just an ordinary electric guitar. It was a magical artifact created by Doc Babylon that'd presumably been enchanted with **[Speaker]**.

Yoshino was happily strumming at the strings, and I couldn't help but be amazed. I was by no means a learned guitarist, but even my ears could pick up that she was playing wonderfully.

Hm? This intro... Wait, this song of all songs? How does she know that one? Did she hear it from me or Sakura in the future?

It was one of the most famous songs performed by a band led by one of the greatest guitarists in rock history. He tragically died at the age of twenty-seven, but his legacy left behind a massive shadow that

future musicians had to stand in. I wondered if Yoshino could pluck the guitar with her teeth like he could. A purple haze, much like the one in the song's title, seemed to surround Yoshino's body... I thought it might've been caused by her singing, but it was Sakura who had started to sing.

A mother-daughter music combo?! Wow, this is great!

Sakura's voice began to shift as the song went on, her tone hitting different segments between husky and bluesy as she matched her daughter's rhythm. She had a tremendous understanding of music, that was for sure.

I couldn't help but tap my foot to the rhythm of Yoshino's guitar strumming. I used to listen to this song a lot as a child, since it was one of my grandpa's favorites, so it really got to me.

"Using performance magic to play music is good, but it's always more fun to do the real thing!" Yoshino said, giggling after the song had come to an end.

Performance magic was a special ability that took musical sound waves and channeled them as magical power. It was similar to Sakura's vocal magic. Yoshino much preferred playing instruments to singing.

If we built a concert hall, I'd have loved to hear them play there...but I wondered if we'd be able to finish it before they had to go home. If we used Babylon to rush construction, then we'd have it in time, but I didn't want to take jobs away from all the hard workers of Brunhild. It was a fine line I had to strike a balance on.

"My liege. Are you well and able right now?"

"Hm? Kohaku?"

I suddenly received a message from Kohaku.

“There is something of an issue at the adventurer’s guild. Lord Kuon and Miss Allis are in a spot of trouble.”

“Huh?”

They’re in trouble at the guild? Why? What could’ve happened?

I raised a curious eyebrow, but wasted no time in opening up a **[Gate]** to go check it out.

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I passed through the **[Gate]** and ended up at the guild. The place was noisier than usual. Even the adventurers who you’d normally find in the tavern next door were all gathered around the entrance to the monster dismantling yard.

I began wading through the crowd of people to go and see what the fuss was about, only to bump into Misha, the catwoman receptionist.

“What’s going on here?”

“Er, well...I think it’d be quicker if you saw for yourself. Come this way,” Misha said as she took me behind the counter, then toward the dismantling yard.

Brunhild’s adventuring guild had a fairly sizable yard around the back. Typically, guild yards weren’t that big, since it wasn’t every day that adventurers brought in especially large kills, and even in the cases where they did, those kills were usually split up in advance and hauled in on wagons. However, Brunhild wasn’t a typical place, hence our atypically large yard. People like Ende and I were capable of using storage magic, and there were also people like Yae and the others who could use the storage function in their smartphones. Plus, with Nia of the Red Cats and Noir’s master Norn adventuring around these parts, big game was just more common around here.

I walked out into the yard and saw a giant monster taking up a ton of space. It looked like a giant wolf with obsidian fur...except it also had

wings...and its tail looked to be some kind of snake. Its eyes had already rolled back to white, while its tongue was lolling out of its mouth. It was very, very dead.

Guildmaster Relisha was there, directing her workers, but her expression was one of perplexion and shock. Nearby, Kuon and Allis sat on a bench, Kohaku and Silver by their side.

“Oh, Your Majesty. You’ve finally arrived.”

“Sorry, did my uh...I mean, my relative’s kid and his friend do something?”

“I wouldn’t say it’s that they did something... Or wait, maybe they did something extreme...?” Relisha mumbled, a strained smile on her face. She wasn’t sure what to say.

“Sorry, fath—er, Your Majesty... Allis and I wanted to earn a little pocket money by hunting down some beasts, but this monster attacked us out of nowhere in the northern forest. It wasn’t too strong, so we defeated it and brought it back to the guild... I hadn’t expected to cause such a commotion,” Kuon said, calmly explaining the situation. It was about what I’d expected.

“I’ve never seen a monster like this before. Have there always been things like this around Brunhild? Did it come in from Regulus, maybe?”

“I would have to say no. This is no ordinary beast.”

As I was pondering the wolf-thing, Relisha walked over and flipped open a book in her hands. The book had a picture of a wolf monster that looked identical to the dead one, but the text on the page was incomprehensible to me. I wondered if it was some ancient language.

“This beast is known as Marchosias. It is an atrocious beast that spits fire and has steel fur. Its strength would be considered silver-rank in the modern day.”

“Interesting... Wait, in the modern day?”

Relisha’s phrasing confused me slightly, so I crooked a brow.

“Marchosias were supposed to have gone extinct three-thousand years ago. No, they might’ve even been extinct by that point. This is a legendary beast, hence the confusion and commotion today.”

Wait, huh?! It’s extinct?! Don’t tell me Kuon and Allis killed the last one?! If this was Earth, they’d totally get in trouble for killing an endangered creature, but thankfully, this is another world. There are plenty of nasty beasts out there that people wouldn’t have an issue with wiping off the map. Goblins and Orcs are first and foremost among them. I don’t think anyone would object to making those things extinct...

“So what’s the issue, exactly?”

“I can’t really put a price on the raw materials. I’m not sure where to even begin with something this ancient and legendary. And, well, we can’t exactly purchase it if we don’t know what to pay...”

That made sense to me. There was no precedent in guild history as far as dealing with one of these things went. But on the other hand, this was an adventurer’s guild, so they didn’t just want to let such promising materials go to waste. It was a conundrum indeed.

“How about we put the carcass up for auction?”

“That could certainly work, I imagine it would sell for a very high amount. However, it was brought in by children, and auctions can’t be set by underage people...” Relisha said as she glanced over at Kuon and Allis. It was never simple around here, that was for sure.

Kuon raised a hand, then said, “What if we were to sell it under your name, Your Majesty? We’d be happy to give you a cut of whatever it sells for.”

“Huh? You sure?”

“Of course. So long as I, and Allis, get our due, of course.”

“Sure, works for me. I wouldn’t have much use for the full sum anyway.”

I wasn’t going to pocket my kid’s hard-earned cash, but I was willing to hand it off to people who would be in charge of it so it wasn’t wasted. Yumina and Ende, in this case. In the meantime, I gave Allis and Kuon a gold coin each as an advance payment. It was equivalent to a hundred thousand yen or so, so it felt a little weird to hand it out as pocket money, but I had little choice...

“So this thing was in the north woods?”

“It was. We were looking for prey around the entrance, but couldn’t find anything. Then, after we ventured deeper, it jumped out and attacked. It was probably the reason we hadn’t had any luck finding other creatures. Might’ve scared them all off.”

If it was a silver-ranked monster, that would’ve put it at the level of a fully grown Dragon. The fact that a monster like this was in close enough proximity to Brunhild’s castle town made me feel a little anxious. Kougyoku usually kept a watchful eye on Brunhild’s borders...so had this thing just slipped past the radar? In any case, I was glad the kids had found and killed this one. If it had gotten too close to the town, it could’ve really hurt someone.

Since the worlds had been joined, new mana pools were cropping up all over the place. It had resulted in the creation of more Behemoths and other unusual species. Relisha had told me that the presence of Behemoths often led to monster stampedes too... And so, with that

in mind, it might've ended up with a stampede in Brunhild had the situation not been brought under control. I felt somewhat lucky.

"Kohaku. Can you check with any animals in the area about unusual monster sightings?"

"Of course. I'll have them sweep the local area as well."

Good. I doubt there'll be any more, but I don't want to take any chances. This thing could still have cubs or a mate or something.

The very fact that it was alive against all odds made me want to be thorough. Plus, magical beasts and monsters worked differently from ordinary animals, so it could've been born from a different species altogether. Goblins were capable of that. This Marchosias might've just been born to an ordinary wolf, as a quirk of magic mutation.

"Hey, Your Majesty? Can we go now? I'd like to go eat with Kuon."

Allis pulled me out of my pondering with an impatient little request.

"Oh, sure thing. I'll handle the rest."

"Yay! See ya, Your Majesty! Look after this thing, please! Let's go, Kuon!"

"Huh? W-Wait, Allis!"

Allis suddenly tossed Silver (still sheathed) at me, grabbed Kuon by the sleeve, and the two of them were gone in the blink of an eye.

"Heeey! Ya little twerp! Don't go treatin' me like some kinda pest! Let me go, boss-man! You don't want the kiddo fallin' into her wicked web, do ya?! She's a harlot!"

"Hey, don't call her that. If you say that in front of her dad, he'll probably snap you in half."

I sighed quietly as Silver flailed around in my hands. I didn't want to let him go, since I figured Allis didn't want a third wheel on her

date...if it was even a date. I didn't know. I wondered if I should ask Yumina about that kind of thing.

"Hyaaaah!"

"Oh."

Silver suddenly slid out of his sheath and flew through the guild at Mach speed. The adventurers all started to panic and jump out of the way as the blade whizzed past them through the air.

Welp, he got away. Allis is probably gonna get mad at me...

"...What was with that sword?"

"Oh, uh, don't worry about it. Anyway, about that auction?"

I didn't want to cause any trouble by telling Relisha too much. Plus, it wasn't like I actually knew that much about Silver.

Wait, wasn't Quun supposed to be looking into that? Well, whatever.

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"Hm... This is troubling..."

"What's troubling?"

Linze, who happened to be knitting nearby, heard me mutter. And so, I saw no point in hiding my issue.

"Just some stuff with Kuon."

"What about Kuon? Is he okay?"

"Oh, he's fine. It's just..."

I wasn't sure exactly how to put it, but compared to the other kids, Kuon didn't seem as close to me. He was definitely close with Yumina, but it felt like he treated me more like an acquaintance than a dad.

“It could just be that boys aren’t as attached to their fathers, maybe...”

“Yeah, I guess. I was kind of the same.”

When I was a little boy, my parents were always busy with work. That was why I had such a strong relationship with my grandpa. I never thought my own son, who had the same name as that grandpa, would end up feeling so distant from me. Life certainly came at you fast.

“Why not go do something with him? I read in a book from Earth that fathers and sons often play catch with each other.”

“Playing catch, huh...?”

Playing catch sounded fun, but...where exactly would I go with that? I knew the kind of kid Kuon was. If I tried kicking up a conversation by asking how he was, he’d probably just say he was fine and we’d stay silent.

The real issue was that I didn’t really know much about Kuon. I didn’t know his interests or his favorite food, for example. Usually, I’d have learned those things as part of raising him, but he showed up with a several-year head start on me...

All right, that’s it. I’ve gotta learn more about my son. Time to ask his sisters for help.

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“Kuon’s favorite food? Hmm...I think cold tofu or chikuzenni? Oh, he likes matsutake mushroom soup as well.”

“That’s way too bland!”

I asked Arcia about Kuon’s preferred foods, and her replies weren’t the kind of things I’d expect a child to like. If anything, it was the kind of thing I’d expect an elderly person to enjoy...

Our household ate a mixture of western and eastern foods, but we mostly ate Japanese cuisine because I happened to enjoy rice. From that perspective, I could see how Kuon's tastes might have developed...but wouldn't a kid usually prefer curry or hamburger steak?

"What kind of food does he dislike, then?"

"I don't think he dislikes anything in particular. He sits and quietly eats everything he's served. Oh, though I think he said he found Xenoahs cuisine too rich once."

...Xenoahs cuisine? I've had that before, I think. It was some kind of weird purple soup with an eye in it. It was a bitter taste, for sure. I think the best comparison for flavor would probably be battery acid. But hey, I've never actually eaten a battery, so I can't say for sure.

In any case, I didn't think it was fair to classify that as food he didn't like. I mean, it was the kind of food I could barely imagine anyone liking, since it was near lethal!

I thanked Arcia and headed off to speak with Elna. She was closer to Kuon's age, so I figured she might know some more.

I know Linne's actually the closest to Kuon's age, but... Well, I don't really think I'd get much out of her...

Elna was sitting by a window in the castle, her nose stuck in a book. Elze was sitting next to her, fast asleep. Seeing my wife like that, with her slovenly sleeping face, was a bit funny. Elna didn't seem to care, though. Presumably, the two of them had been reading together, but Elze dozed off.

"Things Kuon likes? Animals. He talks to cats a lot."

"Huh? Kuon can talk to cats?"

Wait, he has that power? I don't remember any of his mystic eyes doing that. I know there's one that can control animals, but...

“He has Kokaku translate for him. But otherwise, he communicates with the cats using body language. A lot of cats live in Brunhild in the future, and all of them know Kuon.”

What the...? Is my son the Grand Duke of Cats or something? Oh, though I guess if Kohaku's his companion, and Kohaku's the master of animals like cats...that makes him the master of them in turn? So then, he's more like an emperor, I guess? The Emperor of Cats... But wait, I'm Kohaku's master, so what does that make me?

“He talks to birds too.”

“Oh, you mean with Kougyoku?”

Cats and birds were the eyes and ears of Brunhild. Everything they saw and heard was communicated to Kohaku and Kougyoku, who, in turn, relayed the information to Kousaka, Lain, and Tsubaki. Only crime-related matters were relayed, though. We weren't snoopers. And in the event of a sudden emergency or criminal matter, cats or birds could lead our knights to the incident.

“So Kuon likes animals, huh...?”

“I'm not sure if it's the animals he likes, really. I think maybe he likes talking to them more.”

“So he's a talkative person? I never would've guessed...”

Though I guess if he's only talkative with animals, that's a bit different... Seems fine, though. He's not hurting anyone...and I don't think he's a misanthrope.

“He says that if we want to make Brunhild a better place, we need to think about the animals. They see things that we don't, so he thinks he can help you by factoring in their perspective.”

“What a good son!”

Damn, I might cry... He's so thoughtful!

I looked up and pinched the bridge of my nose, sniffing slightly.

Thinking of his parents and the country at such a young age!
That's my boy! He's truly Yumina's son!

"Shut uuup... What's the noise all about..."

Apparently, my excitement was a bit much for Elze, even if most of it was internal. She woke up, so I explained to her that I was asking Elna for information on Kuon, and Elze reached out to wrap her arms around her daughter.

"M-Mother?"

"Elna's just as good a kid as Kuon, y'know? She's studying so hard to help us."

"Huh? Really?"

I looked at the book in Elna's hand. It was a translation of a medical textbook that Leen had brought back from Earth after our honeymoon. Fam, from Babylon's library, had converted a lot of material from Earth into tomes readable in this world. Though the cover said it was an introductory textbook, I could tell it wasn't for children.

"I-I just wanted to help my family in whatever way I could, that's all... I can use the **[Recovery]** Null spell, so I wanted to expand my medical knowledge and help in other areas..."

"What a good girl!"

"Isn't she?!"

Elze cried out joyfully right after I did, squeezing Elna tighter in her arms. I leaned in and stroked my daughter's hair. She was quiet, but she had a very kind heart. I wondered if Elna might be interested in taking over Brunhild's national medical care in the future...only to be reminded that she'd probably leave Brunhild behind after getting married.

My heart... My poor heart...

I shook my head to dispel those awful thoughts, thanked Elna for her help, and bid the two of them farewell.

I think I've got a good grasp on his interests by now. Time to find him and see if he wants to spend some time with his old man.

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"So, how are you?"

"Oh, I'm fine."

Dammit! He did exactly what I thought he'd do!

I'd thrown my pitch, and the kid had hit a home run. I didn't have any retort.

We were watching a match near the shopping district. It was a weekday, and it wasn't a national match with our knight teams, so there wasn't much of a crowd. The bleachers we were sitting in were almost empty, actually.

Our baseball stadium was open to anyone to play in, for a small fee, so on weekdays like this, baseball fans would gather and play games together. Then, people with free time would come and watch them play, just like we were doing now.

I wanted to talk to him in a place where we weren't likely to be interrupted, but I'd kind of fumbled my first question, so I wasn't sure how to follow it up.

"So, uhhh...you got much going on? Any problems lately?"

"Not especially, no. I have no real issues. Oh, he hit the ball."

Ugh... This is a hopeless fight, isn't it? He's just calmly watching the match... No, I can't back down here! I need to get through to my son!

"Say, Kuon...you got any hobbies?"

“Hobbies? Well, I suppose I might? Though I’m not sure if I’d call it a hobby, exactly...”

...What’s that mean? I mean, I guess I don’t really have any particular hobbies either... Does listening to music or watching movies count? He’s my son, so maybe we have similar interests...? If I can just find some common ground...

“Does model-making count?”

“Huh?”

Model-making? Like plastic model robots or dioramas?

“Oh, here. Sometimes I make them to help me unwind. Like this one, here.”

Kuon took out his smartphone and showed me a photograph on it. It was a picture of ships lined up in a harbor, waiting to set sail... Something felt off about it, though.

W-Wait, wait...is this fake?! No way! It looks so real!

“Is that a diorama?!”

“Yes, it is. I made it about a year ago.”

He would’ve been five at that point. He was seriously that good at it even at such a young age? One of the ships leaving the port, the dash of the waves, the little people unloading cargo at the docks... I’d thought it was real at first. It was seriously professional-grade stuff. Not that I’d ever actually seen a professional diorama, of course. It was just kind of a gut impression.

“Some of the finer details were only possible thanks to some magical tools, however.”

I asked a little more and learned Quun had helped him with that. Still, I’d definitely heard of dioramas that used motorized parts and other stuff, so it was no less impressive. If anything, Kuon being able to work with specialized equipment like that was even cooler.

I told him that, only to be met with dismissal.

“It’s not that impressive. You can perform similar feats with **[Modeling]**, no?”

“Well, yeah, but I still think there’s a difference... Mine’s just magic...”

Kuon’s response stunned me a little. We clearly weren’t looking at it the same way.

On Earth, there was no such thing as magic, so the skills one developed through hard work became a legitimate strength. I considered my magic to be cutting corners, or cheating, in a way, so it wasn’t nearly as impressive. However, the people who lived in this world viewed magic as a natural and normal force, so using it was fine. It wasn’t recognized as sneaky or underhanded. Instead, it was just another thing a person could use.

It was true that my **[Modeling]** spell could do similar things, but I definitely couldn’t compare to Kuon when it came to natural talent in actually creating by hand. I could use Babylon’s workshop to mass-produce dioramas, but even then, it wouldn’t be the same. It wouldn’t feel as authentic. Kuon’s skill was nothing to scoff at. If he entered a diorama contest back on Earth, he’d surely have won the top prize.

“Oh, actually...”

I got a sudden idea. I ran a web search for dioramas on my smartphone and projected a bunch of images into the air for Kuon.

“Wow! The details on these are incredible! Look at that one, it’s a whole submerged town!”

Kuon showed a childish sense of excitement as he marveled at the dioramas. It was the first time I’d ever seen him act his age. It reminded me of when I was little, making my own plastic models. I

only ever assembled them, though. I didn't paint them or make scenes or anything.

"Have you tried making any since you arrived in the past?"

"Oh... I've been really busy since I got here... Plus, you need materials and tools, which I don't have."

Apparently, he needed the resin from a particular kind of tree monster and some glue-like substance you could only get from specific Slimes. On top of that, he didn't have his paintbrushes or palette knives. He'd left all of that in his room in the future, after all.

"All right, let's go gather that stuff, then."

"Huh? No, isn't that a bother? Some of the materials I need are quite rare and we'd need to travel and..."

"Relax. It's all good. I have **[Gate]** and **[Search]**, so we're golden."

As far as the tools went, I was sure we'd find the right things for the job in the Babylon storehouse.

It was just a matter of collecting the materials, really. After that, my son could get to work. Oh, though, we'd need paint too. There were a lot of paintings of spirits in the Allent Theocracy, so I could only assume we'd find plenty of art supplies over there.

"Okay, time to go. Full speed ahead!"

"Oh, but I... Um..."

I grabbed Kuon by the hand and opened up a portal, jumping us through to the other side of the world, to the start of our search in Allent.

The art supply store we entered in the Allent Theocracy was fully stocked. There were numerous brushes and shades of paint throughout the store. I told Kuon he could buy anything he wanted, but he still seemed rather reserved about the whole affair. And so, I

decided to make this diorama into an official commission. In other words, it was work, which meant if he wouldn't want to do it half-baked, he'd have to make something special.

With that in mind, Kuon finally let go of his apprehension and asked, "What kind of diorama do you want me to make?"

"Huh? Oh, uh...right... What about our castle?"

"Brunhild Castle, then?"

I didn't really have anything particular in mind, so I just said the first thing I thought of. Kuon didn't seem to mind, though. He took it to heart and immediately began placing various art supplies in his basket. He methodically walked from row to row, grabbing specific items I didn't recognize. The kid was probably already imagining how the diorama would turn out.

After we finished buying the goods, Kuon sent a list to my smartphone.

"Adhesive Slime fluid... Cushionturtle shell... Elder Treant husk?"

I had no idea how he'd be using this stuff, but I knew where to get it. And so, I sent Kuon to Babylon's storehouse, where he could request any tools he needed from Parshe.

While he was busy doing that, I headed off to the adventurer's guild in order to get the materials he'd asked for. Unfortunately, the Cushionturtle shell he needed wasn't available, so I needed to hunt that myself.

Well, I could always sell the nonshell parts, so I figured that was a nice little bonus. The shell was surprisingly soft and spongy. It was kind of like a sponge. The turtles were resistant to blunt damage due to that aspect, so I killed them with slashes instead.

I returned to the castle and found Kuon's room already had a base for the diorama built in the middle of it. That was fast!

“Uhhh... I’ve got your materials...”

“Oh, please set them down here.”

Kuon was wearing a cloth mask on his face, along with a pair of goggles. He was shaving away at the diorama base with a magical tool that resembled a grinder. Presumably, he was trying to create a rough surface to represent the ground.

I put the materials down in the corner and watched Kuon at work. He was working so diligently that I couldn’t help but ask if there was anything I could do to help. He told me to start soaking the Cushionturtle shells in different shades of green paint, dry them out, then shred them into little pieces.

I headed out to the courtyard to do that, then came back. By the time I returned, Kuon had already sculpted most of the roads and moat trenches around the castle.

“Oh, Touya.”

Yumina was sitting on the couch in Kuon’s room, with Kohaku by her side.

“I came to call him down for dinner, but I didn’t expect to see him working on something like this. What an adorable hobby.”

“Yeah, I never knew about it before today. I think he’s a little too skilled to call it just a hobby, though.”

Kuon was probably excited about making a diorama for the first time in a while, so he didn’t stop even when dinner was ready. I had Arcia make some rice balls and sandwiches and brought them to his room so he could eat while working. I should’ve probably brought him down to eat properly, but he wasn’t a very picky eater, so it didn’t really matter at the end of the day.

“Once Kuon gets going, he just doesn’t stop. If you don’t take advantage of his little breaks to get him to call it a night, he’ll work until morning.”

I took Frei’s words to heart, since I didn’t want Kuon working all night. I made him stop when the clock turned ten. His incredible focus was probably how he’d gotten to this level of skill. I had Yumina take him to the adjoining bedroom and let him rest. He could continue after a full night of sleep.

The diorama was already taking on a rough shape. Normally, it would’ve taken more time than this, but the magic tools seemed to make everything more efficient. I was pretty amazed, though... I hadn’t expected that spongy shell I’d torn up to end up being used as decorative shrubs and trees.

I looked at the grass he’d put down on the ground and wondered if it was actually real... It kind of looked like moss up close, but I couldn’t be sure. I wanted to touch it, but I didn’t want to risk messing anything up and upsetting Kuon.

I smiled quietly as I left the room, wondering how the finished product would look.

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I pulled away the cloth, prompting everyone in the room to shout in excited surprise.

The completed diorama of Brunhild Castle was now on display behind a glass case in our lobby. I was in the middle of unveiling it for the first time. Kuon’s sophisticated representation of the local area was so high quality that I felt it’d be a waste to just keep it to myself. This way, everyone who visited us would be able to admire it.

Everyone in the room was immensely interested in the display.

“Wow! It’s so detailed!”

“Incredible... Even the grand duke and his family are there...”

There were miniature figures of us included in the little scene. Yae, Hilde, and Elze were fighting in the sparring grounds. Linze, Leen and Sakura were sitting on the balcony enjoying a spot of tea. Yumina, Sue, and I were sitting underneath the cherry blossom trees in the courtyard, enjoying a great number of lunch boxes that Lu had piled up. There were other little individuals dotted here and there too. Karen and Moroha, Prime Minister Kousaka, and other members of the castle staff too.

Everyone had their eyes glued to the glass case, trying to spot little details inside.



I turned to Kuon with a grin and said, “You sure put a lot of detail in, huh?”

“I’m very particular about the small stuff, yes. I want to get all the tiniest details down, but I still like to add my own flourish as well.”

You definitely have an eye for detail, that’s for sure. I can understand your feelings as a creator, but you might’ve overdone it with all the minute things!

Still, everyone was happy, so there wasn’t anything to worry about.

“Could you teach me how to make one next time?”

“Hm? But you can do something like this with **[Modeling]**, can’t you?”

“Yeah, but I want to make it without magic...like you.”

“...I-if you really want to learn, then sure,” Kuon replied, then gave me a shy little nod.

I think our bond just deepened a little right now.

I wondered what I’d make with Kuon’s help. I’d probably want to start with wood... I felt it’d be cool to make a miniature magic train track or something. Or maybe we could add to the castle diorama and do the whole town? It was exciting to think about all the possibilities.

As I pondered the matter, I ruffled my son’s hair. I was a very proud dad.

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Kuon’s diorama proved incredibly popular...and not just by the people in the castle either. The other world leaders were very impressed when they saw it during the next meeting.

To the surprise of nobody, King Belfast was especially proud of his grandson's work. He declared his own desire for a diorama, so Kuon made a display of Belfast Castle. And since Brunhild Castle's design was based on Belfast Castle, it didn't take him quite as long for that one. Only a few days or so of work went into it.

After that, the other world leaders asked for their own dioramas as well. I told Kuon he could refuse, since I didn't want to strain him...but he said yes anyway. He was too diligent for his own good, frankly.

I didn't want him to get so into it that he'd forget to eat, drink, or sleep, so we made him stick to a schedule that wouldn't completely overtake his life. It wasn't quite the same kind of limit as the old "you can only play video games for one hour a day" rule, but he was allowed a certain period of time per day for him to work on his dioramas.

Allis was very angry at me, as Kuon ended up spending less time with her as a result.

"There are dioramas in most every entry foyer around the world in the future, indeed, but I did not expect them to be made by Kuon's hand from the past..." Yakumo muttered to herself as she looked over one of his most recent works.

Kuon himself had commented on the fact that the first diorama he'd ever seen was the one of Brunhild Castle. He'd never expected the one that had fascinated him in the first place to be his own creation. Had he never made this diorama in the first place, the future Kuon may never have been interested in making dioramas... I wasn't sure what to make of this kind of influence on the future. Surely this had to count as a time paradox of some sort... But then again, the time spirits were supposedly working in the background to stop that kind of thing.

“Time spirits are hard workers. They’re probably tweaking cause and effect in all sorts of places to make sure the future stays the same,” Moroha said as we watched Yakumo and Kuon sparring on the training field.

“So you’re saying the future’s basically fixed? Like, whatever we do will lead to the same thing?”

“Not necessarily. The power of a god, or divine miracles granted to people, can alter the flow of time. Besides, time spirits can make mistakes too. That’s usually how coincidences or accidents come about.”

“Huh, they can make mistakes like that? I was kind of imagining time spirits as living clocks or something. Didn’t realize they could mess up.”

“Ha ha ha ha... Time spirits are still people, even if some of them might look like clocks.”

Makes sense. I guess if gods can make mistakes, then it’s only natural spirits can as well.

“Still, I’d say it’s fair to assume nothing that happens here is gonna impact the future very much, other than the wicked god thing, I guess. Oh, looks like it’s game over.”

I looked over and saw Yakumo’s banged-up wooden sword disarm Kuon, sending his weapon sailing into the air. They’d been clashing for quite a while.

“If Kuon doesn’t use his mystic eye, Yakumo’s got the upper hand in swordplay. He’s very tenacious, though. Good for him.”

Though he’d lost to Yakumo, Kuon was still a very strong fighter. If he used all his mystic eyes properly, he could probably be a match for Yae.

Yakumo and Frei were the only gold-ranked adventurers among my children; the rest were silver. If I had to guess...in terms of pure combat ability, excluding magic, Elna was probably the weakest among my children. But even then, Elna outclassed the average Brunhild knight in terms of raw physical output.

My children were gamebreaking presences, that was for sure. But given that they were literal demigods and had been trained by literal actual gods since they were young, it was to be expected...

“Hmm... Yakumo’s the big sister, so she should go easier on him...”

“If she went easy on him, it would not be training, it would not...”

Yumina grumbled a little, leaving Yae to comfort her as best as she could. Albus sat by her side, silent as ever. The white crown really wasn’t much of a talker.

“Raaargh! He shoulda used me! Hey, kiddo, ya shoulda used me! I’d have brought out way more of yer potential than that lame-o wooden sword!”

The silver crown, on the other hand, never shut up. It clearly wouldn’t have been fair to use a Gollem weapon during a training match, but that didn’t deter the thing.

Kuon came back from the training field, swapping out with Linne. She seemed to be bristling with energy.

“Good work out there, Kuon.”

“Phew... My eldest sister is exhausting at times... She could’ve gone a little easier on me...”

“Pfft!”

“Pfft!”

“What?”

Kuon had said the exact same thing as Yumina, prompting Yae and I to spit out our water. I noticed Yumina's narrowed eyes, so I kept myself from laughing any further.

"You do not seem to enjoy fighting much, you do not," Yae said, speaking up as she watched Linne happily square off against Yakumo.

"That's right. I'm more interested in reading than fighting. Still, I know it's necessary to have strength in this world, so I train. If something were to happen, I wouldn't want to sit on the sidelines."

"Ohhh! See, Yae? Isn't my boy amazing?! What an admirable little man he is! Oh yes, I'm so proud!" Yumina exclaimed as she wrapped both her arms around Kuon and started doting on him. Kuon simply stared forward into the abyss, letting his mother do as she pleased.

"Yumina-dono's growing a little more extreme lately, is she not?"

"Extreme... Yeah, that's one way to put it..."

Out of all the mother-child combos, Yumina was definitely the one who'd shown no signs of calming down with Kuon. I wondered if the fact that he was a boy had anything to do with it. I definitely had a habit of doting on my daughters more, at least...

Still, Yumina wasn't even close to being on the level of the Xenoahs overlord, so it was fine in my book.

I heard footsteps approaching, and turned to see Doc Babylon. Elluka, Fenrir, Quun, and the professor were with her. It was certainly rare to see them down on the surface world, and rarer still for them to be at the training grounds.

"Yo. I asked Cesca where you were, which is how we found you."



“Is something wrong? You finished with the Over Gear yet?”

The Babylon Dev Team was currently working on an Over Gear for Albus, one that could dive deep into the ocean. They hadn’t been giving me many progress reports, so I wondered if it was already complete.

“The Over Gear isn’t finished yet, but we’ve finished the knight Gollems.”

“The knight Gollems?”

I’d heard that there were Gollems in Brunhild in the future, apparently involved with my knight order...but I hadn’t realized Babylon was the one who’d made them.

“Anyway, take a look. Quun?”

“On it.”

Doc Babylon snapped her fingers, prompting Quun to whip out a storage card. She shook it a few times, and two knightly looking Gollems fell out of it.

The knight-type soldat Gollems the professor went around with were in full plate armor, and they looked like any other fully armored person might. These Gollems, on the other hand, seemed to have been designed to be immediately recognized as inhuman.

One was about the same size as an adult male, with a sword at its waist and a shield on its back. The other was bigger, presumably modeled off Ogres or similar creatures. It was probably just shy of three meters tall. They both looked incredibly sturdy, so there was no doubt in my mind that they’d been built for power. Both of them were white matte on the base, with black accents along their frames. They kind of reminded me of police patrol cars.

“Let me introduce them. These knight Golems models are Swordsman and Guardian, respectively,” Doc Babylon explained as she pointed at the two of them triumphantly.

So the smaller one is a Swordsman and the bigger one is a Guardian, huh?

“Why did you make two types, why did you?”

“Swordsman models are for antipersonnel incidents, while Guardian models are for accidents or emergency disaster relief. In short, the Swordsman series is built for fighting human opponents, while the Guardian series is more for clearing debris or fixing upturned carriages. It made more sense to me to have specialized departments.”

The Guardian model was also fitted with a fire extinguisher, apparently. The idea of a Golem with that kind of focus was interesting to me.

The professor suddenly stepped forward, following up on Doc Babylon by saying, “By the way, the strength of the Swordsman model has yet to be properly configured. We thought we’d have the knight order help with determining that.”

“Yet to be properly configured? Why not just make it as strong as possible?” Yumina asked. She seemed confused as she challenged what the Professor said, only for him to respond with a faint smile.

“If we were to base it on the strength of Moroha here, for example, it would be too much strain on the machinery. Not that the Swordsman models could even begin to replicate her strength...but the point still stands. We need to determine optimal strength for the good of the machine.”

...Yeah. I don’t think you could ever build a machine that matches up to a goddess like her.

“The strength needs to be measured enough to not burden the machinery, yet flexible enough to adapt to almost any enemy on the fly. That would be the optimal solution, which is why I would like some of the knights here to fight it.”

“So it’s like a final systems check, then?”

It’d be no good if the Gollems we had were too weak to help the knights, and it’d be worse if they were so overpowered they broke down after a few deployments. If they weren’t capable of changing their strength on the fly, that could be trouble when apprehending criminals too.

The knight Gollems were going to be mass-produced, so we needed to balance all of that with a relatively cheap cost. If we didn’t have to consider expenses, we could just do whatever, but reality wasn’t so accommodating.

“That sounds pretty interesting. I’ll be happy to test this thing out,” Logan, patrol captain of the knight order, said as he stepped in from the sidelines to volunteer himself. We had no issue with that, but only on the condition that both parties used wooden swords. I didn’t want the Golem getting broken so soon after completion.

“Ready... Go!”

Logan charged in with his sword. They exchanged blows twice, then three times...and the Swordsman Golem fell to a blow on the side of its head.

“Huh? Isn’t that too weak?”

“It’s currently set to minimum strength. It needs to do some mock matches to learn moves, techniques, and pattern prediction.”

Huh, so it’s machine learning? Wait, then it’ll get stronger over time?

The Swordsman Gollem fought a few more knights, losing most of the encounters. But slowly, it began to improve its performance until it was winning most of its battles. Eventually, it had become capable enough to defeat Logan.

“I shall be its next foe.”

The next person to stand before the Swordsman Gollem was none other than Kokonoe Jutaro, Yae’s elder brother. He was an Eashenese samurai, but he was staying in Brunhild along with his fiancée, Ayane, and Moroha had been giving him special training for a while. I hadn’t realized he was on the training field today, but apparently he was.

Jutaro and the Swordsman began their clash. At the start, the Swordsman seemed to have the edge over the samurai, but Jutaro continued to press the advantage until he had the tip of his wooden sword pressed up against the machine’s neck.

“That’s enough. Any more and it’ll overheat,” Elluka said, putting an end to the Swordsman Gollem’s training. The Gollem bowed and then retreated from the training field.

“It’s almost as strong as Jutaro. That’s no small feat.”

Jutaro was among the finest fighters from Eashen...though it rarely seemed that way here in Brunhild, given how overpowered so many of the people here were.

“I’ll be making five of these things and deploying them to the castle’s knight garrison. Touya will have master authority, while subauthority can go to the knight commander and vice-commanders.”

That made sense to me. Gradually introducing them would get everyone used to their presence. Brunhild probably had the most Golems out of all the countries on the eastern continent. Noir, Albus, Rouge, and Viola were all seen around town now and then.

And Olba Strand's trading company had recently begun opening up a dedicated Gollem trade sector.

Thinking on it, the people of Brunhild were probably used to Gollems well enough at this point, especially considering the fact that Frame Gears were a national staple.

After all that, we headed back to the castle. Kuon, Yakumo, and the other kids went to the bath straight away. I was about to head to my office to look over some documents, but then Tsubaki suddenly stepped out from behind a nearby pillar.

Agh! That shocked me. You don't have to do that every time, you know?!

"I've two reports to make. The first is that a port town in the Kingdom of Curelia has been destroyed. The wicked devout are believed to be responsible."

"Curelia?"

Uhhh...is that on the western continent? On the eastern edge? I remember the pumpkin pants prince mentioning something about them wanting to join our alliance... So the wicked devout did something there? Shit...

According to Tsubaki's report, the town was attacked by Fishmen, four-armed Gollems, and giant stone men. Some of the survivors had lost their minds entirely, while others were taken over by the Fishman curse and headed into the sea. That certainly sounded like the wicked devout to me.

"Didn't we tell Panaches to keep an eye out for any settlements by the sea, though? Surely they would've told their neighbors."

"If they did, I don't believe the warning was well heeded. There's never been an attack this catastrophic before."

It sounded awful. The occasional village got hit, but it was never as big as this before. Destroying an entire port town was like a declaration of war. We needed to be more vigilant. Everyone needed to be.

It was really annoying that we couldn't predict where they'd emerge like we could with the Phrase, but I knew that was asking for too much... It wasn't like the enemy would freely tell us "Hey! Here's where we're gonna hit next!" or anything.

I started typing up a smartphone message to every world leader I had direct contact with. I told them to be extra vigilant and to inform me of any suspicious sightings immediately. Any country with an adventurer's guild would be much easier for rumors to travel through. If they got me information fast enough, I'd be able to use my magic to send their national knights to the attack sites instantly.

"And the second report?"

"An unidentified magical beast appeared on the fringes of the Regulus Empire's territory. Their local guild chapter killed it, but at no small cost. The problem is that this beast is a complete mystery. It's an entirely new species."

"A new species?"

"Here is a photograph," Tsubaki said as she sent a picture to my phone.

Whoa... It's all bloodied, gross.

It was a full photo of a monster with the body of a lion and the head of a bird. It also had bird limbs, so it was clearly some kind of Chimera.

I briefly wondered if this creature could be a new monster made by the wicked devout.

"It's unlikely, as they did not find any crystal structure in its body."

The Golems and Fishmen controlled by the wicked devout had red and blue crystalline octahedrons embedded in their bodies, but apparently, that wasn't the case here.

So why has this thing appeared now? Who would know about this kind of...? Oh, wait. There might be someone.

I bade Tsubaki farewell after hearing her report, then headed up to Babylon.

"How... How rare."

Fam, the keeper of Babylon's library, crooked a brow as she looked up from her book and saw me.

...Bookwormy as ever, I see. Nah. You've ascended beyond a bookworm. You're a full-blown book addict.

"How can I help you?"

"I'm wondering if you know anything about this thing," I asked as I approached Fam's counter and showed her the picture on my phone.

"Quite the unusual kink you have there, master. Is showing bloodied animals to young girls at random how you get your rocks off?"

"No. It isn't. I'm asking about this monster. Is it a new species?"

Fam adjusted her glasses as she looked over the image. Eventually, she hopped down from her seat and walked over to a bookshelf, then pulled a book out and brought it back.

"It's most likely... Oh, here."

Fam opened the thick book and thudded it down on the desk in front of me. There was an illustration of a magical beast there that looked nearly identical to the one on my phone. However, the writing was in Ancient Spirit Script, and I wasn't actively casting **[Reading]**, so I couldn't tell what it said.

“Ipos. A magical beast that was also known as Ipes or Ayporos depending on the region. It was a particularly aggressive species that inhabited the Ilpanema Woodlands, but its meat was considered so delicious that it was hunted to extinction by the local tribes some five thousand five hundred and seventy-four years ago.”

“Hunted to extinction? So the species is gone?”

“Correct.”

It’s not a new species, but one everyone thought was extinct? Wait, hold on! Isn’t that the same story with the thing Kuon and Allis killed? That Marchosias wolf thing? Wasn’t that supposed to be extinct too?

“What the hell does this mean?”

Magical beasts thought to be extinct were apparently making a comeback. Had they come from Palerius Island or something? That place had been left behind by time, but that didn’t really make sense...

“Did they...come through time?”

Had some unknown force pulled these monsters from their own eras and into my own? It wasn’t an impossible scenario. My children had traveled to the past from the future, so why couldn’t it work the other way around?

Was this the work of another timequake, perhaps?

“I’m gonna need to consult an expert.”

I hurriedly pulled out my phone and dialed Granny Tokie’s number.

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“This is most certainly the result of a timequake. Monsters from the past have come forth into our present,” Granny Tokie said,

confirming that the monsters had slipped through time. It was just as I'd suspected from the start.

"You're the goddess of Space-Time, right? Can't you send them back to their own eras or something?"

"I certainly could in theory, but... I am sure you know, young Touya, that the divine such as I are forbidden from interfering in mortal affairs. Free use of my abilities in a direct capacity could have unknowable consequences. Well...there are some loopholes, I suppose, but I'd rather not go through them if I can feasibly avoid it."

You can, but you won't? Dang it... I guess you're higher on the totem pole than I am. It's fine for me to do some stuff, but she's probably way stronger than me.

"I would also rather conserve my power so I can send your children back when the time is right. If I use it now, and then become unable to use it for your family, I imagine your present and future selves would be rather upset."

Ugh... She's got a point. That'd really suck.

"Timequakes are natural phenomena as well, so there is little need for me to interfere with them. I'm sure they've even happened on the Earth that you hail from, even."

"Hmm, now that you mention it..."

I've definitely heard stories of people slipping through time back on Earth.

There was the Moberly-Jourdain incident, where two teachers visiting the Palace of Versailles claimed to have slipped through time and briefly experienced events from over a hundred years before their births. Then, there was also the story of a man who was walking around New York in a daze before being hit by a car and killed...and they found items on him that suggested he had actually traveled forward in time from the 1800s somehow. Plus, there were also

plenty of people on the internet who claimed that they were time travelers from the future. I didn't know how much of that was actually true, however. Earth didn't have magic, after all. Though, if timequakes were natural phenomena that could happen anyway, perhaps some of those stories were actually rooted in reality...

At this point, I'm just confused as to why we've had two timequake incidents so close to each other.

"The timequake tremors should die down over time, so you needn't worry. I doubt we'll have any fixed points from this either."

"Fixed points? What are those?"

"It's a permanent connection between two points in time. You might call it a time tunnel, I suppose. It would allow free travel from either direction. Of course, that would jumble up past, present, and future... It would create something of a mess. The only way to fix that would be through my own power, but to use my power would mean breaking the rules and interfering with the mortal realm... Something of a conundrum, to be sure. Typically, the solution would be to deploy the god of destruction."

Wait, so the world would just get wrecked? I've heard the trope about worlds getting destroyed or rewritten in time travel fiction, but who'd have thought it was true...

"You needn't worry, though. It won't come to that. I am the goddess of Space-Time for a reason, after all. That said, I'm not entirely comfortable with the circumstances as they are..."

"Are you talking about the wicked devout?"

"Indeed. Even dregs such as them have divine power, so I do hope they don't do anything ridiculous... After all, Touya...you've been recognized as a god properly now... If they were to fully revive a wicked god upon the soil of this world, well..."

Wait... Right! I wouldn't be able to interfere, would I?! That'd be against the rules! I guess I could fight it without my divinity, but I don't know if I'd be able to kill it that way... Oh damn, that totally sucks. But wait, wicked gods sprout up all over the place, don't they? If gods can't ordinarily interfere to defeat them, then...

"The typical method of dealing with such foes is to grant divine artifacts or tools to an appointed human hero. If that fails, the god of destruction does his job."

Okay, that's not so bad, then. Yeah, it'll be fine. I can just make a powerful enough weapon and give it to some hero in this world or something to fight in my stead. Easy.

"Can I choose Yumina or any beneficiaries of my divinity to be the heroes?"

"You cannot. Those who benefit from your divinity are as kin to the divine themselves. Like angels."

Seriously? Well, I guess my wives are definitely angels... I knew that from the start.

But still, that meant I needed to choose some mortal or mortals to act as heroes in my stead... Moroha probably couldn't be a hero, even if she was in a mortal body... Her status as a god probably excluded her from it.

But then, who exactly could defeat a wicked god? Oh, wait, I know! Ende! He's got those divine twinblades, right? If I help him out, it'll be fine.

"At any rate, there may be some minor aftereffects from the timequakes. I'll ensure the time spirits work extra hard to prevent any potential damage."

"Got it. Best of luck."

There was nothing I could really do, so I just left it in Granny Tokie's hands. I thanked her, then promptly ended the call.

Fam looked up from the book she was engrossed in and asked, "Done with your call?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah. Looks like it fell through time after all. Actually, are monsters all that different now compared to back when you were born?"

"Oh, yes. There are definitely more nowadays. When the ancient civilization thrived, warding technology was deployed fairly regularly within its territory. Thus, monsters and magical beasts were relegated to the frontier lands. And as a result, only the mightiest of beasts tended to survive. So while there are more monsters nowadays, they're largely weaker."

Huh... The Marchosias and the Ipos were definitely red-rank monsters, but I guess it wasn't just random luck? Were all the monsters back then roughly that strong?

I'd already told the guild to tell me if any strong monsters showed up, but not every country had a guild branch. The Kingdom of Curelia wasn't part of the alliance, for example, and their port town was lost as a result. We probably needed to expand our global information network to be safe.

"Indeed. You should work harder to interact more closely with all the nations of the world. That's your main mission, master. Focus on it."

"...Any reason you're so keen to get me moving?"

"Hm? Why wouldn't I be? More countries mean more books for my library! It's the noblest pursuit of all!"

Oh... I guess it's true that I haven't brought a lot of books here lately. Fam's pretty voracious when it comes to reading materials, so she's probably been getting agitated.

Fam always talked about her role in the library as some official business, but I knew in her heart of hearts that she was just an obsessive bookworm. Her reasons might've been dressed up in noble

talks of media preservation, but she was definitely driven by selfish motivation.

“All right, relax. I’ll get you some new books later.”

“Bring me literature from some of those newfound nations. I want to see how writing changes from country to country.”

Newfound ones, huh...? Hmm, I guess I’ve never seen any books from Lassei or Gandhilis. Alternatively, I could go buy some books from countries I’ve never really set foot in. Curelia aside, I still haven’t made contact with the Rephan Kingdom or the Kingdom of Langeais.

That was largely because I tended to wait until I was officially referred to them by other world leaders, though. My official relationship with the nations on the western continent was still somewhat shaky, since I didn’t have a lot of contacts there. Plus, there was that weird rumor going around that I was the one who’d destroyed Isengard.

I shrugged and sighed, certain that I’d eventually make more royal contacts.

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“Father! Father! Father! Faaaaaaaaaaaaather!”

“Bwaugh!”

Once I returned to the castle from Babylon, I was immediately met with a side tackle from Frei. Seriously, I’d barely made it one step into the hallway before she’d catapulted herself into my side like I was a quarterback.

“Ghaaagh...”

“Father! Listen! Father! King Felsen is hosting an auction for armor that once belonged to the legendary champion Dahmuel! But money! We don’t have enough money!”

“Calm down... I don’t know what you’re saying...”

Frei started babbling about something or other, but I was far too dazed and confused from the tackle to even begin to process what she was going on about. And so, I applied some restoration magic to my aching back, slowly rose to my feet, and tried my best to calm Frei down.

After she’d settled, she explained to me that there was an auction to be held in Felsen. And among the items for sale, there was a set of armor once worn by some legendary hero named Dahmuel.

King Felsen, knowing of Frei’s interest in such things, sent her an email about it. Frankly, I’d have been a lot happier if he hadn’t said anything...

“So what, you want that armor?”

“I do, yes! In the future, Dahmuel’s armor is missing! I’ve never even seen it before! I’ve only heard stories!”

...It’s missing in the future? Does the person who wins the auction lose it, or something? I know if King Felsen won it, he’d probably just put it in his royal collection...and you couldn’t pull a heist on that vault easily, so does that mean King Felsen isn’t gonna bid on it?

“King Felsen said he won’t be bidding on it, no. Apparently, he doesn’t have very much pocket money this month.”

...Damn, he’s got a personal allowance? His wife must be reining him in.

I could understand his apprehension, though. It wouldn’t have been good if public money was used for the king’s personal collection. Hobby purchases like that were best made with money the king saved up personally.

“Dahmuel’s armor needs to be preserved! Preserved for the future, I say!” Frei exclaimed, her eyes ablaze with desire. Though she spoke

nobly about armor preservation, I could tell her desires were driven by selfish needs.

“Sure, I don’t have a problem with you bidding on it...but with what money, exactly?”

“That’s precisely why I’m here, father! Take me out Dragon slaying! We can kill another Fiendrake and make money!”

“Huh, you wanna go out again?”

It certainly made sense, at least. If Frei wanted money, that was the best option. But honestly, I wasn’t sure about letting her use all that reward cash just for an auction... And unfortunately, I couldn’t just loan her the money, since Hilde would definitely have a problem with that.

“Come on, father! Just tell me where the nearest Fiendrake is! Or furthest! I can have Yoshino or Yakumo send me!”

“Hrm...”

I guess you could just go there with either of those two thanks to [Gate] or [Teleport], huh?

“If you get Hilde’s permission, then...”

“I’m on it!” Frei roared as she dashed off, a huge grin on her face. She certainly needed to learn a thing or two about calming down...

A few minutes later, she triumphantly returned. Apparently, Hilde had given her consent. Yakumo and Linne came with her.

“I would like to test my blade against the Fiendrakes of this era.”

“Yeah, and this time I wanna kill one without breaking it into pieces!”

“Hey, hold on! You two are just coming for support! I need most of the money, okay?!”

Apparently, Frei had already decided she was getting the lion’s share of the reward. She sure was greedy. Though honestly, I couldn’t

blame her if she was on a tight deadline. The auction was approaching, after all.

I was a little exasperated, but she'd gotten permission...so I simply shrugged and started looking up the location of the nearest Fiendrake.

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Frei and the others ended up killing the Fiendrake and selling its body to the guild for quite the tidy sum. We quickly ran into another issue, however. The auction in Felsen was not open for minors to participate in. That wasn't too surprising, but it was still a pain.

"Oh, my bad... I forgot about that," King Felsen apologized over the phone. He was so single-minded when it came to his hobbies that he'd probably forgotten he was texting a literal child.

Still, it wasn't the end of the world. We could just get an adult to bid at Frei's proxy. And, as you might have guessed, that duty fell to me. As for the reason...

"Because I know you'll win the bid, father! I believe in you!" Frei exclaimed excitedly, beaming over at me all the while, causing a rosy flush to rise to my cheeks.

Gosh... With expectations like those, I can't afford to lose...

"Do not be deceived by her wiles, Touya. She's likely thinking that if the bidding goes beyond her budget, you'll step in and cover the difference. Isn't that right, Frei?"

"N-N-N-Not at all!"

Hilde's comment caused Frei to stiffen up and shift her eyes from side to side.

...Yeah. Guess that makes sense.

“Listen, Frei. This is money that you earned. I won’t tell you how to spend it, but I must ask that you don’t use it to cause trouble for people around you. Understood?”

“Okay...”

“It’s a promise, then. Break that promise and I’ll have Touya take away all your weapons.”

“O-Okay! It’s a promise!”

Frei, trying to hide the panic in her eyes, brought her hand up to salute her mother. Hilde sure had controlling Frei down to an art. I was impressed.



With that out of the way, I activated **[Gate]** and took Frei to Felsen's capital city. The auction was to be held at the museum in the city, and it wouldn't be long until things kicked off.

I checked the location on my smartphone, and the museum was only a short walk away. I walked over toward it with Frei, who seemed in high spirits. It wasn't long before she was skipping and humming to herself.

"Hey, don't get too excited, okay? It's still an auction, so you might not win that armor."

I didn't want her building her hopes up too high, since it'd be sadder if they got dashed. I didn't want to bring her mood down or anything either, but she needed to keep the possibility of losing at the back of her mind. Apparently, King Felsen had secured enough funding to bid personally too...so he'd be one to watch out for.

"It's all right! I don't think many people will care about Dahmuel's armor. The only other person I know who really wants it is King Felsen, so if we have more money than him, we'll win!"

"Huh? Not many people care about it? Why?"

"Dahmuel's armor is cursed. If you wear it, you'll be in for a world of pain, so it's not a super popular treasure!"

"Why would you want that?!"

Cursed armor?! You didn't think to mention that sooner?!

Frei noticed my panic and quickly moved to elaborate.

"It's fine, really. It's not a bad curse or anything! I think it's Pain Heal or Life Conversion, so it's just minor! Don't worry!"

...Pain Heal? Isn't that the curse that doubles the power of recovery magic, but causes massive pain when it's cast on you? And

Life Conversion's a curse that amplifies your magic power in exchange for years of your life span, right? That's kind of a crazy power... Wait, how can you call those things minor?! That's pretty intense! What was this Dahmuel trying to do, exactly? Become a Dark Knight or something?

"What kinda guy was this Dahmuel, anyway?"

"They called him the self-sacrificing hero..."

...Self-sacrificing? Something tells me the guy was probably just a weird masochist. Less of a champion and more of a pervert.

"...Frei, you're not gonna equip the armor, are you? I don't wanna bid on it if you're planning on that."

"I don't want to wear it. I just want to add it to my collection. Besides, Dahmuel was over two meters tall. King Felsen could wear his armor, but it wouldn't fit me."

That was reassuring... If that was the case, then it'd be fine to let her have it. Or would it? Would it really be fine? It was still a cursed item...

I quietly struggled with my personal hang-ups about the armor until we arrived at Felsen's Capital Museum. It was an ornate white building with sublime architectural design. The museum was home to many powerful magical artifacts from Felsen's distant past.

Though it was called a museum, it was somewhat different from the ones back on Earth. For starters, it wasn't commonly open to the public. It was more of an exhibition hall for the nobility, so really it was closer to a state-funded artifact storage facility rather than an open place anyone could come to look through.

While the venue was owned by the state, the auction itself was sponsored by Felsen's primary financial guild, the Magicraft Commissary. That was why King Felsen couldn't just butt in and

secure any of the goods for himself. It was an independent operation.

I handed over my invitation to the nearest security guard before proceeding inside the building. A great number of people had already gathered. I could tell from their extravagant, gaudy outfits that most of the people here were either wealthy nobles or rich merchants.

“You should’ve brought a crown or something fancy to wear, father.”

“...Yeah, like I’d be caught dead in something like that.”

I had no interest in wearing a crown in private, let alone in public. Hell, Brunhild didn’t even have an official crown to begin with. We were smaller than Belfast and Regulus, so it would have felt way out of place to wear something that formal.

I headed over to the desk and completed my auction registration. Then, I was given directions to the seat that had been reserved for us. It was a pretty good spot... King Felsen had been generous with us, clearly.

I was given an auction calling card, as well as a catalog that listed everything we’d be able to bid on. There were no photographs, of course, but every listing had an illustration accompanying it.

I flipped through the catalog until I found the armor Frei wanted.

...Of course. Of course it’s the armor covered in spikes with skulls on the shoulders and spooky eyeballs carved into the chest. Why wouldn’t it be that one?

“Wow! It looks even cooler than I thought!”

“Not the word I’d have used...”

Frei let out an excited giggle as she gazed at the illustration. I simply shook my head, completely unaware of where my daughter’s poor aesthetic sense had come from.

◇ ◇ ◇

The Felsen Museum had a large hall set aside for the auction. I was somewhat surprised to see that a great number of guests had already arrived and taken their seats.

...Is everyone here to bid on stuff? They all look pretty rich.

“Uhhh... Our seat’s over...where, exactly?”

Frei tugged at my sleeve after I said that.

Oh, is it over there?

“Father, King Felsen’s here.”

“Huh?”

I glanced over to where Frei was pointing, only to see King Felsen himself waving at us. Or at least, it was probably King Felsen. He was wearing a domino mask on his face, presumably to keep his identity concealed. I wanted to go and say hello, but he was a good distance away and I didn’t want to risk outing his identity. As such, I just gave him a small nod and decided I’d go and see him after the auction was over. I still needed to find my seat, after all. Didn’t want to still be standing when the auction began.

I looked around and saw that King Felsen wasn’t the only one wearing a mask; there were a bunch of nobles with various facial coverings. It was possible that they didn’t want to be recognized in the event they won...or perhaps they wanted to spend money without their spouses finding out...

After a small while spent fumbling around, we eventually found my seat. It was a pretty good spot, not too far from the front of the stage. Both Frei and I had a great view of the items from that spot. Before I sat down, I picked up my paddle. It had a number on it corresponding to my seat. I checked, and apparently, all you had to

do was raise your paddle to indicate your bid. It was basically the same way auctions worked back on Earth.

I sat down, Frei sat next to me, and I started thumbing through the auction catalog. Apparently, this auction wasn't just for weapons and armor, but also rare art and antiques.

I glanced over the items, but I didn't really see anything I was interested in. The catalog had images and descriptions of the goods, but nothing indicated what the bids started at, or what they could go up to. From what I understood, the sellers usually set a minimum amount that had to be reached or the item wouldn't sell.

"Do you really want this thing?"

I looked over the listing for Dahmuel's armor again, a small frown on my face. It looked totally distasteful, to the point that simply staring at it immediately gave you the impression that it was cursed. Plus, it was actually cursed!

"I guess I can remove the curse, at least..."

"Absolutely not, father! If you break the curse, it won't be nearly as valuable! I wouldn't want you to change a thing about it!"

"Ugh..."

I didn't understand my daughter at all. Why was she happier about it being cursed? I didn't get it. However, at the same time, she was my daughter... I wanted to make her happy, so I just decided to suck it up.

I passed the catalog to Frei, and she lit up after looking through a couple of the pages.

"Whoa! Matlack's dagger?! Hnnnh! I want that too... But money... My money... I... Nooo!"

Why're you giving me that look? I mean, I know why...but gimme a break here.

“...If it’s not too expensive, we can get it, maybe.”

“I love you!”

Hilde’s gonna kick me into the sun. Dammit... Why am I such a pushover when it comes to my daughters? They’re playing me like a damn fiddle...

I groaned, but my attention was suddenly captured by the presence of the auctioneer as he walked onto the stage.

The first thing that came out was some kind of vase. Apparently, it was some three-thousand-year-old work of art. The auctioneer explained that it once belonged to the king of some dead nation and that a war was fought over it that led to said nation’s death. I thought it was kind of cool that the item had a story to go with it, but wondered who would want something so grim. My question was quickly answered by a flurry of excited hands that shot into the air. I was clearly out of my depth. I didn’t understand these people at all.

The bidding only intensified after that, with various interesting items coming up for sale. You could only use gold coins to raise your bid for this auction, so in Earth terms that was something akin to raising your bid by at least a hundred thousand yen each time. It made sense, though. If we were going with silver coins, the bids would probably drag on forever, and with everyone getting caught in the heat of the moment, it guaranteed a nice payout for the sellers.

Some of the items ended up selling for insane amounts, though...which led me to wonder if any of these people understood that they were spending real money... I could understand being invested in a hobby, but not if it drained your wallet to this degree. There was enthusiasm, and then there was obsession. These frenzied bidders barely seemed human to me.

“Father! Matlack’s dagger is next! You’ve gotta bid on it! Do it!”

...My daughter barely seems human right now too.

Anxiety began to set in as the next item was brought into the hall. It was basically just a dagger. There was a slit running through the middle that split the blade into a left and right side. It kind of looked more like a two-pronged fork than a dagger. The kind of thing you'd use to jab at a bowl of fruit, essentially.

Matlack's dagger, huh...? Well, okay.

The auctioneer cleared his throat before speaking into his loudspeaker-like artifact to say, "Many of us know of the mercenary nation, Catan. It once flourished under the guidance of its mighty king...and the great General Matlack who served as that king's intrepid right arm. The dagger we have today is believed to have been a gift from Matlack to his son. The pronged blade is composed of mithril, while the decorative parts are orichalcum. Even after a thousand years, you can see it still retains its beautiful luster. Shall we start the bidding?"

"A hundred coins!"

Bwah?! A hundred gold coins?! Ten million yen for a fruit fork?! Are you crazy?!

I was stunned into silence right out of the gate, and that was just the opening bid.

Seriously? For that thing? I could make one myself...

"A hundred and ten!"

"A hundred twenty!"

"A hundred twenty-five!"

Eep! It's going up?! Is it that popular?!

"Father! The paddle! Hurry!"

"But it's already higher than what I was gonna bid..."

“It’s Matlack’s dagger, father! A hundred coins is more than reasonable! If you don’t bid, we’ll lose it at a bargain price!”

...Really? I can’t say I know much about this kind of thing, but if Frei’s saying it, then maybe it’s true... I guess the money Frei got for killing the Fiendrake was more than this, so maybe this isn’t actually that much money at all.

“Uhm, okay... A hundred and thirt—”

“A hundred and thirty-five!”

Before I could even finish speaking, another bidder beat me from across the room. He was a chubby aristocrat with a shit-eating grin on his face.

Gah... Do I back down or...

“A hundred and forty!”

“A hundred and fifty!”

“A hundred and sixty!”

“A-A hundred and sixty-five!”

“A hundred and seventy!”

“A hundred and seventy...two!”

The tubby aristocrat was clearly running out of steam. He was probably close to his budget. The contest was just between me and him now, as everyone else had dropped out. That was why I decided to make a decisive call.

“Two hundred coins!”

“Ah...!”

The fat man didn’t raise his paddle again. He just sat in his chair, pouting.

I did it... I bought it. No, I didn’t just buy it... I won it!

“Sold! The item goes to the fine gentleman in seat sixty-five for the price of two hundred coins!”

The sound of the auctioneer’s hammer thwapping down reverberated through the hall.

“I did it! I won the item!”

...Oh crap. I got carried away, didn’t I? Dammit! I bought it for twice the opening bid!

Frei was ecstatic, but I knew Hilde would have words to say to me about this... Just picturing her scary, forced smile was enough to give me the shivers.

I sat back down, then started wondering why King Felsen hadn’t placed a bid on the dagger. Wasn’t he supposed to be a weapon maniac like Frei?

“King Felsen doesn’t care for weapons that haven’t seen actual combat. Matlack’s dagger wasn’t ever actually used by Matlack, so he doesn’t value it.”

Oh yeah, the auctioneer said something like that. Matlack gave it as a gift to his son or whatever. Well, I guess that’s lucky for us. I might’ve ended up spending more if the king was in the running.

Whatever the case, I had spent twenty million yen on a single dagger. That was no small sum. My daughter had me wrapped around her little finger, and there wasn’t anything I could say to deny that.

Still, she can earn more than that on her own if she puts in a little effort... It’s not like she’s wasting her allowance, so it’s not that bad... Hmm, maybe I just became a little less human. I can feel the fiscal responsibility flowing out of my body... I get it... I get it now.

The auctions continued, and I found myself thinking about how potentially lucrative these things could be... I almost felt dirty as I considered setting up one of my own.

Between my [Storage] and the Babylon storehouse, I had a ton of junk materials and magical tools I never used. I realized if I put them on the auction circuit, I could make some crazy cash. There had to be people out there who wanted those things, right? Wasn't it a waste to just have them sitting around unused by me?

Hmm, maybe I can sell them to the other world leaders at our next summit meeting...

"Next item, folks. An artificial spellstone crafted in the ancient days of the magic kingdom. No stone of this size has ever been seen anywhere else in the world! I'm sad to say that its magical power has been almost completely drained, but it still holds considerable value as a collector's piece and a rare gem!"

When the auctioneer finished speaking, the attendants brought in a massive red crystal the size of a balance ball.

That's an artificial spellstone from some ancient kingdom or whatever? Spellstones can store and amplify magic, right? I guess they saw a lot of use as power sources in the past. But natural ones were hard to find back then, and they're even harder still to come across nowadays. That's why artificial ones ended up getting created. They're not as good as natural ones, though. They can only contain the magic power they were created with, so there's no refueling them. In other words, they're disposable batteries.

That made this item pretty useless to me. Even if it was an ancient remnant, it didn't mean much if it was drained. Plus, Doc Babylon had already made a breakthrough with spellstone production. She'd created several that could be recharged, and they were used in the Babylon tower, and as a general power source in the other Babylon facilities.

The doc's improved artificial spellstones were something similar to a Golem's G-Cube. They took in magic from the surrounding atmosphere, amplified it internally, and used it to empower

themselves. Phrasium was somewhat similar too. If I had to guess, the spellstone I was looking at now was probably used in some huge factory or facility. It was drained, so it had no application as a power source, but it sure was pretty.

“Let’s start the bidding!”

“One thousand seven hundred!”

Bwugh?! You’re going in at a hundred and seventy million yen to start?! It’s just a big stone! You can’t do anything with it! I’m sure it has historical value, but...

To my horror and surprise, a furious bidding war began over the spellstone. It was definitely valuable as a rare gem, and it was massive...but was it really worth this much? From my perspective, it was just a big, glass orb. But, well, I had to defer to the experts here. Clearly, they saw something more in this thing than I did. Perhaps its rarity made it worth such an absurd starting bid?

“One thousand eight hundred and fifty!”

“One thousand eight hundred and fifty-five!”

“Two thousand.”

Shock and awe rippled through the crowd. I turned to see a noble in a blue mask. He was quite a way back in the hallway, but his paddle was raised high into the air and his manner was surprisingly calm.

...Two thousand gold coins? That’s extreme. Way too extreme. That’s over two hundred million yen.

“Two thousand...one hundred!”

A gaudy merchant with a prominent overbite raised his own paddle, outbidding the blue-masked man. The crowd was kicked up into a frenzy by this sudden turn. The merchant, apparently enjoying the attention, soaked in the cheers. Or at least he did, until...

“Three thousand,” the masked noble said, putting in another absurd bid, his voice calm as ever. The bucktoothed merchant scowled and groaned before tossing his paddle to the floor in a rage.

“Sold! The item goes to the magnanimous gentleman in seat ninety-eight for the price of three thousand coins!” The wooden hammer came down once more, sealing the deal.

...Three thousand gold coins. Three hundred million yen... That's the highest bid I've seen today.

I shuddered to think how high the bidding might've gone if the stone still had any juice left in it.

I guess I've heard about equally absurd prices for jewels back on Earth, so maybe that's just how it is? People are always gonna spend money...

“I can't believe he'd spend so much on something so ridiculous...”

“We should see if they're selling any mirrors so you can look into it.”

Frei's words could've been just as easily applied to herself.

I looked over and saw the blue-masked noble leaving the hall with his attendants. Apparently, he was only here for the stone. Then again, he'd probably wiped out his savings on that big purchase. Or at least, part of me hoped he had. The bucktoothed merchant left as well. He'd presumably come here only for that stone as well.

The auction continued after that, but there was nothing that prompted me to bid. There was a set of five necklaces that might've been nice for my wives, but the set was short about four of them. I couldn't just buy five.

“And now, the final item! The legendary armor worn by the ancient champion, Dahmuel! It is a cursed cuirass that eats at your body while granting you great power!”

A terrifying bluish-black armor was carted into the hall. It was, presumably, Dahmuel's armor. Honestly, it looked even creepier up close.

Why's this the centerpiece, exactly? It's pretty eye-catching, I guess... It also has literal eyes on it... I really don't know if I wanna bid on this thing. Ugh!

"Father! We can't lose to King Felsen!"

"If we lose, we lose. I'm using your funds, okay? I'm not going over."

The money Frei got from her hunt wasn't infinite. If the bidding went over that amount, there wasn't anything I could do. There was a chance I would win it in one fell swoop if I just bid high right off the bat, but it was probably smarter to try going up in smaller increments.

"Let the bidding commence!"

"Five hundred!"

What?! Fifty million yen already? That's a lot...

"Five hundred and ten!"

Oh, someone went up by ten already.

I glanced over to see who the second bidder was...and sure enough...King Felsen was there with a raised paddle.

So he's going with the small increment plan too, huh? Not that this amount of money is small, exactly.

"Five hundred and twenty!"

"Five hundred and thirty!"

Oh? I thought it'd just be a bidding war between a few enthusiasts, but it looks like the crowd's getting pretty excited about it. This might be a problem...

"Father! You have to join the running!"

“All right, I’ll go...five hundred and forty!”



I'll raise my bid in increments of ten. Frei has eight royal coins, which is equivalent to around eight hundred gold coins. Hopefully, we won't have to go that high, though...

"Six hundred!"

Another man in the hall suddenly raised the bid by a ton.

Dammit, don't do that! You'll start a chain reaction!

"Six hundred and thirty!"

"Six hundred and seventy!"

Dammit! Noooo!

The bidding was quickly turning insane, with all the bidders doing their best to flex how much they could bid.

"Seven hundred and fifty!"

Just as I began to hesitate, King Felsen stepped in with another outrageous bid.

Wait, won't the prime minister tell you off for bidding that much?!

The sudden jump caused some stragglers to peter off, thinning the competition.

Wait...I need to bid too or I'll be out.

"Seven hundred and sixty!"

Okay! Another ten added! If we stay under eight hundred, I can still win this! It might be okay!

"Seven hundred and seventy!"

Hngh! King Felsen added another ten? He's probably getting close to his limit too... Let's see if I can defeat him, then...

"Eight hundred!"

“Hngh... Gah...”

King Felsen looked at me with a shocked look that seemed to say, “Seriously?” And then, with a resolute swoosh of his arm, he raised his paddle once more.

“Eight hundred and fifty!”

Shit. He’s bested me...

King Felsen adopted a smug grin and shot it my way.

That bastard...

I glanced over at Frei and slowly shook my head. We were at our limit. I could’ve added more, but we’d bought the dagger...and I knew Hilde would definitely kill me if I pushed it any further than that.

With that, I set my paddle down in defeat.

“Sold! The item goes to the fine gentleman in seat twenty-five for the price of eight hundred and fifty coins!”

The wooden hammer came slamming down. King Felsen’s expression suddenly shifted to a stiff smile as his victory was confirmed.

Don’t tell me...

He suddenly started to nervously chat to his entourage, and part of me wondered if he didn’t have enough money. He was still a world leader, so he’d definitely be able to pay...but I had a feeling he’d gone over budget. That might’ve been my fault, but he was the one who decided to outbid me.

“Waaah... I shouldn’t have asked for Matlack’s dagger...” Frei exclaimed, letting out a pitiful groan.

She was right. If it wasn’t for that dagger, we probably could’ve beaten King Felsen for the armor. Judging by the guy’s pale

expression, he'd hit his absolute limit with that final bid. Still, that was his problem now. And hey, at least we'd won one nice thing.

With the auction over, the guests filed out of the hall. It was time for the winners to exchange their money for the goods they'd won.

We stood up and went off to pick up the dagger.

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Three men walked out of the auction, carrying the item they'd won. Their prize was contained within a large box that was half the size of an average man. It was being hoisted and carried by the largest of the trio, a lumbering giant who stood roughly two meters tall.

"Did you really pay thirty royal coins for this thing? Why not just attack the hall and steal it? Are you nuts?" the youngest of the three, a gray-haired boy, asked, complaining to the slit-eyed man he was standing next to. His face had been concealed by a domino mask up until that exact moment, but suddenly, his appalled expression was on full display.

"What if we attacked this place and the item was damaged, hm? And this is Felsen, the magic kingdom! It would be poor form for us to attack without scouting out what possible magical security systems or artifacts they have in place. It made more sense to obtain this the legitimate way," the brown-haired, narrow-eyed man replied, letting out a sigh in response to his companion's short fuse. He didn't have the patience for the youth's hot-blooded nature.

"Besides, there was quite the threat here tonight."

The grand duke of Brunhild, Mochizuki Touya himself, had been present. He was the inheritor of an ancient legacy, a mediator between nations, a great hero to the world...and a natural enemy of the wicked devout.

The narrow-eyed man, Indigo, was quietly relieved that things had gone off without a hitch. If his identity had been unveiled and he'd been forced to fight, he wouldn't have been able to obtain the artificial spellstone he required. Why, he'd have probably had to retreat. And if that had happened, then Scarlet would've never let him hear the end of it and his plan would've been ruined.

"He didn't look that strong to me. Right, Hazel? He looked like a weakling."

"You... You want me...chop meat?"

"No. No chopping right now, Hazel. Just hold the box. Don't drop it, okay?"

"Ohkaaay," Hazel mumbled as he clutched the heavy crate tight.

The three of them were just heading into an alley so they could warp away when a group of men suddenly appeared to confront them. Indigo raised a brow, recognizing one of them. It was the bucktoothed merchant, flanked by some bulky men armed with weapons.

The merchant pursed his lips before sneering and pointing at Hazel.

"Hand over the box, ya big lug. We can do this the easy way...or the hard way."

Before they could even respond, the trio realized that there were more men behind them. They were surrounded on either side of the alley.

"What's the deal here?"

"I imagine they want to murder us and take the spellstone. It's a fairly simplistic idea, but the kind you only expect from a lowlife. It won't do any good to explain that this isn't actually an artificial spellstone," the narrow-eyed man said, casually explaining the situation to the gray-haired boy.

In response, the boy cheerily took the spear hanging at his waist and brandished it. Before the merchant or his men could even blink, the little spear had extended into a long metallic-purple weapon.

“That means we can kill them, right? Self-defense applies here, I’d say!”

“...Want me cut...meat?”

“You just keep a firm hold on the box. We need to keep that thing safe. Let Orchid take out this trash.”

The bucktoothed merchant scowled, apparently not amused by the indifference the three men were showing.

“Get them! Get the stone!”

The burly men closed in on the trio...but in only a few seconds, all their weapons went soaring through the air. The spear-wielding boy had disarmed them with a single slash of his weapon...and then that spear drove itself deep into one of the men’s chests. As he died, his mind was still processing the pain.

“What?!”

“Hwah?! ”

“One down,” the boy cheerily mumbled to himself before leaping off the dead man toward his companions. The alley was soon illuminated by numerous flashes of purple light.

Several men were brutally butchered that night in the back alleys of Felsen’s capital.



Chapter II: The Ryutei's Rebirth

"Hmm... I dunno what to do about this."

I looked over the armor in front of me with a frown on my face. It was Dahmuel's armor, an ancient artifact that looked tremendously cursed. King Felsen had won it at the auction, so you'd be right to wonder why I had it in front of me now. In short, I bought it directly from him.

I hadn't forced him to sell it or anything. He'd actually come to me asking if I could take it off his hands. Apparently, both his wife and the prime minister of Felsen were close to killing him because the amount he'd bid was way over the budget and they'd need to dip into the national coffers for it. And so, even though he'd won it fair and square, they'd immediately told him to return it or sell it off. That was why he turned to me.

I personally had no appreciation for the armor at all, but I felt so bad for King Felsen that I just bought it up out of pity. After all, it was kind of my fault the bidding got so high... Thus, now I had this suit of armor and no idea what to do with it.

Frei couldn't win it at the auction, so she used her hunting funds to pay for the dagger she'd won instead. That meant I didn't end up covering the cost of the daggers myself, which was a relief.

Thanks to that, Hilde wasn't mad at me...but she definitely would have been if I gave this armor to Frei as a gift. After all, she knew how much the cursed stuff cost because our daughter couldn't keep her damn mouth shut. And so, here I was in an impossible situation, having bought something I couldn't exactly just give away.

I guess I'll just put it in [Storage] and hand it over to Frei when she's an adult. I think Hilde'll be fine with it if I do it like that, kind of like putting away money for college tuition... Wait. Could this be the

reason Frei doesn't know where Dahmuel's armor is in the future? Is it because it's still in my [Storage] or something?

"...Well, I'm not gonna worry about it."

After I'd tossed Dahmuel's armor into [Storage], Yumina came knocking at my door.

"Touya, you have a message from the grand potentate of Lassei."

"The military kingdom?"

The Lassei Military Kingdom was a nation of warriors who put martial arts above all else. Their leader, the grand potentate, was a dragonkin named Gimlet Gal Lassei. It was a country of demihumans and beastmen like Mismede. Since it was located to the north of Isengard, it had historically been attacked several times. Thus, they'd developed a strict, defensive military culture.

The people of Lassei preferred to fight one-on-one as opposed to using machines to do the fighting for them, so the vast majority of Golems in the military kingdom were the kind you equipped to your own body. Lassei was part of the League of United Nations, so it wasn't too unusual to get a letter from their leader...but I couldn't help but wonder why they hadn't just texted or called me.

"When it comes to giving official national notice, it's best to put it on paper. Brunhild does that too, Touya. That's why you have your official stamp and seal."

Oh yeah, that makes sense. I guess it being a letter means it's official business, rather than something casual.

As far as Brunhild's administration went, Yumina was in charge of corresponding with other countries. She knew all the ins and outs of the formalities, after all. She was effectively our main diplomat, but it might have been more apt to call her the minister of foreign affairs. If another country wanted to make formal contact with us, it pretty much always went through her.

I took the letter from Yumina and looked it over.

“Hmm...”

“Is there something wrong?”

“No, it says that the dragon emperor of Orphen wants to join the United Nations through Lassei...”

The Nation of Orphen, also known as the Ryuhou Lands, was an island nation located far to the west of Lassei. It was the flipped version of Eashen, its counterpart in the Reverse World. Perhaps that was the reason why, much like Eashen, it had so much in common with Japan. Then again, while they wore stuff similar to Japanese-style clothing, they still had more of a western-style influence in their daily attire. Weaponwise, they mostly used katanas and they ate their meals with chopsticks.

In Eashen, Shirahime ruled as the mikado. But in Orphen, the ruler was either the ryutei or the houtei, meaning dragon emperor and phoenix emperor respectively. The title of ryutei or houtei was determined by the birthright of whoever assumed the imperial throne. If you were of the Ryu family, your title would be ryutei. If you were of the Hou family, you’d be crowned as houtei.

The nobility of Orphen was split into two households, in effect. The Ryu family and the Hou family. The ryutei or houtei was elected from one of these two noble groups, and when the previous emperor died the new one was chosen from the other side. In other words, a ryutei is followed by a houtei, and so on and so forth.

Apparently, Orphen wanted to join our budding alliance, but that wasn’t all the letter said. It informed me that a legendary golden elixir was circulating in Orphen’s territory, the very same vile substance created by the wicked devout. The drug was an addictive fluid laden with a foul curse that ate away at your vitality until you became a shell of your former self. I’d sent the sample that Yakumo

had brought back to Flora for analysis, and had immediately tasked her with putting together an antidote.

It ended up being a far more complicated substance than any of us could've imagined, probably on account of it being made from mutant phrasium. It took a great deal of resources to figure out how to counteract the curse's effects, but we'd finally made a breakthrough and created a cure just a few days earlier. And from there, I'd set about sending it off to Lassei, Strain, and Triharan. They were the first three countries I'd known of that had the drug circulating in their population, after all.

The most impacted place was still the land that had formerly been Isengard, but since that place was in a state of anarchy, there wasn't really a lot I could do in the way of distribution. Also, because production of the drug was still limited, I had restricted it to the three nations in the alliance who needed it most, but apparently, Orphen had found out about it and that was why they'd requested to join.

I wasn't about to reject them. If anything, I was glad for their interest, but I was mildly concerned about whether or not we had enough of the detox to go around. My **[Recovery]** spell could certainly help those affected, but I was only one person.

"I'm heading up to Babylon real quick."

I told Yumina my plan, then used **[Teleport]** to warp up to Babylon's alchemy lab. As I walked into it, I immediately spotted Flora. What I wasn't expecting, however, was the presence of Elze and Elna.

"Huh, fancy seeing you two here. What's up?"

"I'm just escorting Elna. She wants to learn about potions and such from Flora."

Potions were simple medicines that adventurers took on the road to heal simple wounds. They weren't as effective as healing spells, but

they were useful in a pinch and the adventurer's guild regularly endorsed their use. Babylon had its own share of them, but because these were made using the knowledge of a long-lost civilization, the ones brewed here were capable of healing even the most grievous of wounds. They were extremely convenient, but they weren't cheap to make.

The changing landscape of the world meant that the ingredients used to brew them, once commonplace in the ancient world, were now only obtainable from rare, endangered beasts that you couldn't exactly find just by walking into a forest. I'd provided the recipes to the guild, though. In theory, they'd be able to brew these things if they could actually gather the ingredients. Still, I wasn't sure why Elna was interested in making potions... Wasn't she a wielder of Light magic? She could cast healing spells, so potions didn't exactly seem all that necessary to me.

Elna got a little fidgety when I asked, but eventually, she opened her mouth to speak.

"U-Uh, well... I... I was hoping to find out a way to make a more effective potion that doesn't cost so much... I was thinking if I could do that and give it to the guild, then we could save more lives... Th-That's all..."

"Whaaat?! Ahhh! You're amazing, Elna!"

"Right?! Isn't she perfect?!"

I found myself overcome with emotion, rushing in to give Elna a huge hug. Elze immediately joined in as well.

"Awaaaah..."

"...You're both as bad as each other, I see."

Flora's gaze was surprisingly cold, but I didn't care. My little girl was so thoughtful and lovely... We'd definitely raised her well, that was

for sure! I sat there, being proud of my future self for a moment, when Flora suddenly snapped me out of it by asking what I actually wanted.

“Oh, umm... I wanted to know how much of the golden detox you’ve got in stock.”

“Oh, that? I’m not so sure, you see. Enough for a hundred doses or so?”

Only a hundred? It’s better than nothing, I guess.

“We don’t have a lot of the materials, you see. Moonbranch droplets are especially scarce. We’ve already run out of the stock we had in the storehouse, you see.”

“Moonbranch droplets?”

“Dewdrops from a moonbranch tree. It has to be dewdrops from the morning after a full moon too,” Elna replied, answering my question.

Wow... You sure know a lot...

Apparently, she’d just heard it from Flora, but I was still proud of her.

“So, uh, where would you normally get it?”

“They used to grow south of here, at least during our era. But that’s the Sandora region now, you see.”

...Sandora? That’s just desert now. There are a couple of oases, sure, but I dunno about trees.

The region itself was pretty desolate now. It used to be the Burning Kingdom of Sandora, but now it was just a collection of small city-states that carried on in name only. It wasn’t a safe place to be, and if the rumors were right, it was filled with thugs, kidnappers, and other criminals. I couldn’t help but wonder if someone was going to bring order to the place eventually.

“Could those trees even survive in the desert? Lemme see if I can run a search for them.”

I used **[Recall]** to peek into Flora’s memories and find out what the trees looked like, and then, I ran a search of Sandora’s territory on my phone. Unfortunately, there were no hits.

They’re not extinct, are they?

“Can’t you look all over the world instead?” Elze asked, chiming in with an extremely obvious point I’d failed to consider. Thus, I expanded the range of my search to cover the whole world.

*It’s kind of a wide range, so it’ll take a bit longer than usual...
Hmm... Oh! There we go! A hit! They’re not extinct!*

The map showed very few of the trees on the eastern continent, but there were a good handful more on the western continent.

Huh, looks like the place with the most of them is Rhea... Guess that’s not surprising, really. That place was full of plant life... But oh, wait. Orphen’s got some too. Maybe we can get them to supply us as a form of trade for the medicine?

“We require a lot of materials you can’t find in Brunhild, you see. I think if we made use of trade agreements with other nations, then we would be able to produce it faster.”

Hm. So if Orphen supplies the moonbranch droplets...and other countries supply the other materials...then if we all open trade with each other, we can start manufacturing the medicine all over the place.

That settled it. I decided to go see the grand potentate of Lassei for an introduction to Orphen’s leadership.

The current leader of Orphen is the houtei, if I’m not mistaken? I’ll take Kougyoku with me in that case. If houtei means phoenix emperor, then what better bird to bring along with me? Also, I remember using phoenix down or something like that when I was

creating the puretree. I should still have some left over. Maybe they'll like it if I bring some down as a gift? I should still have some in [Storage], I think...

Phoenix down was a raw material you could use to revive someone. You could even use it to bring someone back from the dead if you acted quickly enough. It was pointless to use on someone who was old or frail, though. They had to be an otherwise healthy person.

I'd actually given an emergency revival medicine made from phoenix down to each of the heads of state that I knew, just as a contingency in case the worst happened. I assumed the leadership of Orphen would be happy to receive phoenix down from me, but there was also the possibility they'd be mad at me for taking feathers from an animal they probably revered...

It wasn't like I'd ripped the feathers off, though! They were given willingly! In the worst-case scenario, I'd probably need to summon a phoenix to clarify the situation.

"Are you going to the Ryuhou Lands, Touya?"

"Mhm. I'm gonna deliver some of the detox we've made. The gold drug is spreading pretty fast over there, so I figured it'd be best to start counteracting it. Plus, I've never been to Orphen before, so it'd be a good chance to see the place..."

Elna suddenly tugged at my sleeve while I was talking to Elze. I wondered what she wanted.

"Sh-Shouldn't I join you? I can use **[Recovery]**... I want to help anyone who might need it..."

"Auuugh! You're such a good girl! You're a total angel!" Elze cried out in joy as she gave our daughter another big hug.

Elna was my daughter, so she was technically a demigod. If you took that into account...then she totally was an angel! A cute little angel!

“You both have a terminal case of parental idiocy, I see.”

Shut up. I don't wanna hear a peep out of you. My girl's an angel, that's all there is to it.

“Okay, Elna. You wanna come with us?”

“Mhm!”

“I'm coming with you, Elna! Your mommy's gonna keep you safe!”
Elze exclaimed as she clenched her fists and knocked them together.

*...Uh, Elze? We're not gonna go beat anyone up over there...
We're going to help them, remember?*

In any case, we wouldn't be going straight to Orphen. It was proper procedure to get an introduction from Lassei, since they'd sent the letter.

I'd need to grab some phoenix down to use as a gift too, and if they were joining our alliance, I'd have to prepare a smartphone...

All right, I better go prepare...

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“So this is Orphen, huh... The Ryuhou Lands...?”

I passed through the **[Gate]** Yakumo had opened for me and emerged in Orpheus, the capital city. The town looked like a mishmash of western and Japanese architecture. The first thing that came to mind was the kind of city you might've seen in the Taisho era. It was almost like a clash of retro and modern, two different styles in conflict with one another.

The people in town were dressed in a manner that reminded me of the Taisho era as well. They wore kimonos and hakamas, but they were wearing shirts, pants, and boots under them. Some were more upscale fashion, while others had a more rugged look. And there weren't just humans here either; I could see beastmen walking

around. It didn't look like discrimination was an issue here, at least at a glance.

There were a few foreigners dotted around, my party included, but nobody seemed to give us a second look. Orphen probably had something of an open mind when it came to different people, since their main point of foreign contact was Lassei, and Lassei was primarily populated by beastmen.

"Oh, what's with that fancy carriage? Is that coming for us?"

As I was admiring the streets and looking around, Elze suddenly pointed out a gaudy, four-horse carriage nearby. I'd had the Lassei potentate relay that I'd be visiting, so Elze was probably right. This was our ride.

"Pardon me, Your Highness. Would you happen to be Mochizuki Touya, grand duke of Brunhild? Accompanied by Grand Duchess Elze and Grand Duchess Yumina of Brunhild?"

A coachman addressed us, and once I nodded, he opened up the door and allowed us entry. The group I'd brought to Orphen was relatively small. Yumina was here as a diplomat, Elze and Elna had come along out of interest, a small handful of knights were with us, and Kuon was here for the ride too.

Kuon was here because Yumina had practically dragged him over. She clearly wanted to go on a trip with her son and had used the formality of the occasion as an excuse. He didn't have it in him to outright refuse, so he quietly accepted and just followed along. I couldn't help but feel a bit sorry for him... Silver was also here, though he'd shrunk down to the size of a dagger and was sitting on Kuon's belt.

I'd had the necessary officials informed that I'd be bringing family with me, so there were no issues with Elna or Kuon, but everyone around was staring at Kougyoku as if they were looking at something

out of a dream. I wondered what the deal was. Kougyoku had been perched atop Elna's shoulder, so the stares were all directed in her general direction. It was making her feel pretty self-conscious.

Perhaps Kougyoku was aware of this, as she switched perches and sat on my shoulder instead. Everyone's gaze shifted accordingly, prompting my daughter to let out a deep sigh of relief.

"Is there a problem?"

"Oh, no... It's just that the bird with you looks remarkably similar to the auspice we worship..."

Auspice? Probably the phoenix, right? I've only seen one phoenix before, but Kougyoku definitely looks similar to one. The only real difference is in the length of her tail feathers.

The carriage was a spacious one, with more than enough room for all five of us plus the knights.

"So it's the houtei in this era..." Kuon mumbled quietly as the carriage rattled down the road.

"What's that, Kuon?"

"In our era, it's the ryutei."

Huh, I see. So there's a change in rulers between now and when my kids are born, I guess? Is the houtei an old man or something? Well, it's not like he has to die to abdicate. He could be in good health, for all I know.

Eventually, the carriage made it to the imperial palace. It was an enormous, beautiful building, but the most striking thing about it was how familiar it looked.

It looked just like the phoenix hall of Byodo-in, the temple depicted on the ten-yen coin. Plus, it reminded me of the castles I'd seen in Eashen too. That kind of architecture was just natural in some places, it seemed.

From what I'd heard about Orphen, they had two palaces. This one was used during the reign of the houtei, while the other one was used during the reign of the ryutei. I wondered what the ryutei's palace looked like... Maybe it had a dragon wrapped around it or something? That sounded cool.

We walked across a deep red carpet, strolling past various red pillars as we followed our attendant. After some time, we came to a set of two large doors with phoenixes carved across the frames. They opened out into what seemed to be a large conference room populated by various individuals.

"It is a pleasure to greet you, Grand Duke and Duchesses of Brunhild. The honor is all mine, I assure you. Welcome to Orphen."

We were greeted by a person who wore a small golden crown on their head. I wondered if this was the houtei... That would surprise me, given how young this person looked...and the fact that she was a woman. The thought hadn't even entered my mind.

She looked to be in her midtwenties and wore a ceremonial red dress with golden and silver phoenixes embroidered into it. Her hair was a long cascade of red, sleek and shiny, and her eyes were narrow beads of red as well.

"Thank you for having us, honorable houtei. I would like to offer you our gratitude on behalf of all of Brunhild."

I looked around and noticed that the people in the room were split into two sides with the houtei standing in the middle. One side was red, while the other was blue. Red was probably the Hou family and blue was probably the Ryu family.

I was a little puzzled, however... If this girl was the leader of Orphen, I couldn't imagine why she'd be replaced by the ryutei not too long from now.

...I really, really hope she isn't assassinated or something.

With that unpleasant thought lingering in the back of my mind, I cleared my throat and took a step forward.

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“Wh-What... I-Is this...? I-It can’t be!”

Huh? What’s with that reaction?

I’d come to the Ryuhou Lands to offer them membership in the League of United Nations. While there, I’d also presented the houtei with a hundred doses of golden detox. After that, I’d told her about the moonbranch droplets we needed to manufacture more of the stuff and advised on opening up trade so we could get a wider distribution network. Then, I handed over a couple of mass-produced smartphones and showed her how to use her own before remembering the present I’d brought. I’d almost completely forgotten.

I’d placed it in a fancy wooden box to emphasize its value, but when the lid came off, the look on the houtei’s face wasn’t what I’d expected. It looked as if she were about to cry.

The middle-aged prime minister, garbed in a ceremonial blue robe, suddenly spoke up in her stead.

“G-Grand Duke... Could this be ho-ou feather?!”

“Uhhh, we call it phoenix down where I’m from, but it’s basically the same thing.”

Kougyoku had told me phoenixes and ho-ous were not quite the same, but they were close enough that their feathers did the same thing. In any case, I had half expected them to react badly to this, so I was worried it was veering into a situation where I’d somehow offended them by giving them the feathers of a bird they revered...

“W-We can use this to make the revival elixir! We can save Tatsuma-sama!”

“My lady! The revival elixir is a precious item! Don’t be so rash with its usage!”

“Don’t try to sway her! We can save Tatsuma-sama with this! Don’t try to stop it just because you’re a Hou!”

“Silence! The Ryu family has other candidates, are you forgetting Tatsuya-sama?! It would be a waste to use it now!”

“A waste?! How dare you!”

Hostility was beginning to bubble up in the room as the red-robos and blue-robos started to yell at each other. I wasn’t sure why, but apparently, I hadn’t done anything worthy of offense.

I glanced back at the houtei...only to notice her crying... The ruckus wasn’t doing her any good, that was for sure.

“All right... **[Silence]**.”

I invoked my Null spell, causing all the noise in the room to fade away at once. The Orphen officials glanced around in flustered panic as they realized their mouths were no longer making any sounds.

“Please calm down, everyone. If you can explain what the situation is, we might be able to help you.”

I had deliberately set the spell not to silence myself or the people with me. That way, I could still speak.

After a short time, the houtei gave me a nod and I undid the magic.

“...Forgive our discourtesy. It brings me no joy to provide our guests with such a shameful display... For that, I am deeply sorry,” the houtei said, bowing her head.

I didn’t really care about the discourtesy or whatever. I just didn’t want to see my gift end up being the reason for a civil war breaking out between their two noble houses.

“As far as explaining things, please allow me. The story trickles back fifteen years...”

According to the houtei, the previous leader of the Ryuhou Lands was a ryutei named Tatsuma. He was a wise and benevolent ruler whom the houtei loved as an elder brother.

The Ryu and Hou families were not openly hostile, though there was still a sense of opposition between them. That was why Tatsuma, the ryutei of the time, was able to have such a close relationship with Houka, the girl next in line to become houtei.

Unfortunately, an incident happened fifteen years ago that would change their lives forever. It happened at the ryutei’s palace, the dragon hall. In short, Ryutei Tatsuma had died in a terrible accident. A heavy altar suddenly collapsed and fell forward, crushing him beneath it.

“But it was I who was standing in front of that altar back then. Tatsuma-sama realized it was falling, so he jumped in the way to save my life...but lost his own in the process.”

Revival medicines were made long ago in the Ryuhou Lands, but they hadn’t been seen in over a thousand years because the raw ingredients were so scarce. And yet, the houtei still held out hope, so she ordered that Tatsuma’s body be preserved.

“I can use what you people refer to as Null magic. My spell is called **[Sealing]**, which stops the progression of time and can store things. Only small things, however...”

*Hoh... Isn’t that just **[Storage]**, then? Sounds similar. Didn’t know the houtei could do something like that.*

On the western continent, storage cards were a common magic tool people used for storing Gollems and other such items. They couldn’t stop the flow of time, however.

It seemed like the houtei's **[Sealing]** spell had the same limitations as my **[Storage]**, in that it couldn't seal living things inside. Tatsuma's corpse, however, was not technically a living thing.

"I could not give up on him... I wanted to see Tatsuma-sama's smiling face at least once more. It was something I'd always loved, ever since I was a little girl. And yet, I know my duties...and I would not want Tatsuma-sama to think I have forgotten them. I have given my all to my nation for the last fifteen years. But at the same time, little by little, I've had people collecting the ingredients to bring him back to us. The last ingredient we required was a ho-ou feather...but now it's here!"

Oh. Now I get it. That's why you were crying... The man you loved as an elder brother and who saved your life can finally return to the land of the living. Yeah, I'd probably cry too.

I heard a sniffing sound to my left...and when I turned toward its source, I saw Elna sniffing and sobbing at the story.

What?!

"L-Lady Houtei... Th-Thank goodness!"

Huh? Elna! He's not even revived yet!

"Come on, Elna. Wipe your tears..." Elze mumbled as she wiped Elna's face with a handkerchief. However, it looked like she was on the verge of tears as well. They really were mother and daughter.

I glanced over at the other mother-child pair I'd brought with me.

"Most interesting. So the houtei and the Ryu family intend to use the medicine to restore the previous ryutei to life?"

"So it seems. Yet the Hou family likely wishes to save the medicine in case something happens to the houtei herself."

Yumina and Kuon were quietly dissecting the situation between themselves.

...Yep. Another case of a child mirroring mother... Can't my kids be more like their dad?! It wouldn't hurt!

"If Tatsuma-sama hadn't saved me that day, I would have been the one to die. Now it's my turn to save him!"

"But my lady! We can't possibly use that medicine! There's no guarantee we can even make that medicine!"

One of the houtei's aides raised his voice. He was garbed in red, meaning he was of the Hou family. He was presumably concerned about the houtei if it didn't work out, but he looked a little shady...

Huh? I never even considered it not working out. Is this guy being sincere?

I side-eyed Yumina, then she gave me a nod.

"Touya."

"Huh? Oh, yeah. I know."

I reached into **[Storage]** and pulled out a small medicinal bottle filled with blue liquid.

"What's this?"

"Revival potion."

"What?!"

The nobles of the Ryuhou Lands stared at me in shock and awe. That was only natural, though. I'd just casually pulled out something they'd spent the last fifteen years searching for and arguing over.

"You can have it."

"What?! W-We can?!"

"Yeah. Call it a perk of joining our alliance. Just the one bottle, though. The other world leaders have one too."

“Th-Thank you so much!” the houtei exclaimed as she took it from me, clutching it tight to her chest as more tears welled up in her eyes.

I would’ve normally given her the medicine after getting to know her a bit better, but Yumina must have given me the nod after confirming the houtei and her aides were pure of intent. The guy didn’t seem as shady as he seemed at first after all.

“Grand Duke of Brunhild. I am terribly sorry to ask more of you, and I am eternally grateful for all you’ve done up until now...but I hear you wield healing spells. Might you aid us further in Tatsuma-sama’s revival? If you could heal the wounds upon his flesh, we can begin the healing ceremony in earnest.”

“Huh? Sure, I guess...”

The moment I nodded, the room exploded into an uproar once again. The blue-garbed Ryu nobles were especially flustered.

“Quickly! Quickly! Call the healing sage and the medicine man! Place the ritual wards!”

“Send an envoy to the dragon hall! Someone inform Tatsuya-sama!”

“Make room! Clear a space none shall pass until the ceremony is over!”

We moved to another room, while the nobles scrambled to prepare the ceremony. Then, it was just a matter of waiting.

While we were drinking tea in the reception room, the prime minister came over to pay his respects. He was garbed in blue, meaning he was of the Ryu family.

“I cannot express the depths of my thanks! On behalf of Tatsuya-sama and the entire Ryu family, truly... Thank you!”

“Oh, uh... I mean. We haven’t brought him back yet, so you’re welcome, but... Thank me later!”

I wanted him to stop because it was just putting more pressure on me. I didn't want to think about what would happen if the potion didn't work.

Elna must have noticed my concern, as she tugged on my sleeve with her own worries.

"Does the medicine not always work?"

"Yeah. There've been cases like that. Firstly, the body needs to be in proper physical condition. Even if it's externally intact, internal damage will mean the person can't come back. Well, no, that's not true. They come back and then immediately die again. It's pretty awful, honestly. Secondly, if a person's already been revived once, then they can't come back again. The medicine is something you can only ever use one time. Oh, and the last case is the most likely one. If the soul isn't in his body, then the medicine will be useless. Without a soul, you're not yourself. You don't have life. Those are just some of the possible things that could go wrong."

I rattled off the explanation for Elna's sake, but I also wanted the prime minister to have realistic expectations. After all, I'd feel absolutely awful if Tatsuma couldn't come back after all this fanfare...

Still, any eternal and internal trauma could be healed by my magic. Plus, if it was true what the houtei had said and that he was frozen in her storage immediately after dying, then his soul was quite possibly still there.

That basically meant that he could probably come back unless he'd already used revival medicine in the past. There was another possibility that would stop him from coming back as well, though. It would depend entirely on whether or not he had any regrets or grudges.

If a person died harboring hate or grudges toward others, then their soul would become a wraith and separate from their body. If that happened, then there'd be no hope for saving him, as his soul would already be long gone chasing after whoever he hated in life.

From what the houtei had told me, however, I highly doubted Tatsuma would have any grudges. He selflessly sacrificed himself, after all. Though it was still possible that his soul could've detached from his body due to some kind of regret...

A soul typically left the body at the moment of death. If it was a pure soul, it would incarnate into the next life and the body would be at peace. But if the soul left the body and became a wraith or specter, then the body would remain behind as a zombie.

"Say, who's this Tatsuya everyone was mentioning?" Kuon asked, sipping his tea as he posed the question to the prime minister. I was curious about that too, since the name had come up a few times during the earlier chitchat.

"Tatsuya-sama is the younger brother of the previous ryutei, Tatsuma-sama. He's a candidate to be the next ryutei."

Oh, the younger brother? Yeah, it makes sense that they'd contact him.

Elze tilted her head slightly as the prime minister spoke.

"Candidate? So the next ryutei hasn't been decided?"

"That's correct. The ryutei and houtei are chosen from the ten families that make up the Ryu and Hou families, yet it shames me to say that we of the Ryu are not in complete agreement on our successor... But if Tatsuma-sama is revived, then he can take his mantle once more and reign as he had previously. The families can agree on that, at least."

Huh. Tatsuma must've been a really well-liked leader. I guess it's no surprise his own people love him, if the houtei herself admires him that much.

"So what about the current houtei? What becomes of her?"

"She took the throne due to feeling responsible for Tatsuma-sama's death, but made it clear to all of us that she would happily lift the burden of leadership from her shoulders in favor of Tatsuma-sama, should he ever return."

Huh, I see. So she's just ready to throw in the towel, huh?

In that case, I was a bit concerned about the Hou family. Maybe that shady-looking guy wasn't actually concerned about the safety of the procedure after all. It almost felt like they'd be reluctant to see the ryutei revived, since it would mean their family was no longer the one in power.

Still, I was probably being too suspicious and doubtful of others. That guy was probably just looking out for the houtei.

I took another sip of my tea when a red-garbed man suddenly entered the room.

"The preparations are complete. Right this way, please."

Revival time... All right, let's get this... Wait, what about the kids?

"Yumina, Elze. Can you wait here with the children?"

I didn't really want my kids to see a corpse up close and personal. I also didn't want them to be there in case anything went wrong and all of the nobles had their happiness crushed.

"Understood. We'll be waiting here, Touya."

"Take care out there."

The two of them seemed to be on the same page as me, which I appreciated.

I took Kougyoku with me and followed the red-garbed man. We passed through a corridor lined with red columns, walking until I must have been at the back of the palace. It was there that I was ushered into a quiet room.

“We’re ready for you, Grand Duke. It’s all prepared.”

The houtei bowed her head to me as I entered the room. Before her, atop a bed, was the body of a young man. It was the ryutei’s corpse. He looked to be in his midtwenties, his body was adorned with a gorgeous blue robe, and his long black hair was tied behind his head. He was tall and had a handsome face, but it was marred with a grisly wound on his forehead that still leaked blood.

...Was that what killed him? A blow to the head?

In any case, the dripping blood was proof enough that he was no longer frozen in time.

All right, no time to waste. Let’s get on with the treatment.

I used my divine sight to sense his soul. There was a pretty, shimmering thing in his chest. It was wiggling around as if trying to escape his body, and I couldn’t sense any abnormalities. In other words, there was no damage.

Lucky me. That’s a load off my mind.

“All right, let’s do this. Come forth, Light! Calm of the Goddess:
[Mega Heal]!”

“Oooh!”

Surprised gasps rose from the crowd around me as the ryutei’s body was wrapped in a gentle, flowing light. The wound on the side of his head closed up, as did his other wounds. Before long, his body looked pristine. The internal damage he’d suffered when he was trapped under the altar was also patched up in no time flat.

“He’s healed!”

“The physical harm’s reversed, at least. Now we just need to use the medicine to settle his spiritual side.”

“Of course!”

The houtei cradled the ryutei’s head as she opened the medicinal vial.

“Please come back to us, Tatsuma-sama!”

She slowly poured the medicine into his mouth. He didn’t actually have to swallow it, as it simply needed to enter his body. He could’ve taken it in through his nose and it still would’ve worked. Then, once the medicine settled in his body, it would begin stimulating the connection between his soul and his flesh. I’d never seen anyone get resurrected before, so I had no idea how long it’d take for the medicine to kick in.

Flora had told me it wouldn’t take much, but I had no way to be sure. I didn’t even know if it would work.

“Tatsuma-sama! Please...”

The houtei and the others watched over the young man on the bed, their every breath laden with anxiety. I was somewhat worried it might not go to plan either.

If he can come back, please bring him back! I’m under a lot of pressure here, dammit!

“Look! Tatsuma-sama’s complexion!”

Slowly, the ryutei’s pale skin began to deepen in color until it was reddish. His eyelids and lips began to twitch to life as well.

“Tatsuma-sama!”

The houtei could only watch as the ryutei stirred from his slumber.

“Hrkh!”

“Ah!”

The ryutei's body trembled as he let out a sputtering cough. After a few more convulsions, his eyes slowly opened.

"...Where am I? What is...? What *is* this?"

The very moment those words passed through the ryutei's lips, the room exploded into excitement. Tears streamed down the faces of those in the Ryu and Hou families alike. It was clear that this man had been loved dearly.

"Tatsuma-sama!"

The houtei was so overcome with emotion that she wrapped her arms around the ryutei's body and pulled him into a tight embrace.

"What?! Wh-What is this?! Wh-Who are you?!"

The room suddenly quietened down as the red-faced boy let out a bashful shout...

...Has he lost his memories?!

"It's me! Houka!"

"...Houka? Don't be ridiculous. Houka's a little girl!"

Those words dispelled the tension, and there were even a few relieved chuckles. That made perfect sense. It had been fifteen years since the ryutei had died, which was more than enough time for a child to grow into an adult. It was only obvious he'd be confused by the people around him.

"Wait, Houka! Is she okay?! There was that incident, and then..."

"That's what I'm saying! I am Houka! You died protecting me, Tatsuma-sama... That was fifteen years ago, and now you've been brought back with revival medicine."

"What? That's ridiculous... Wait, no... Is that...? You there, are you Ryuzan?! Why do you look so old?!"

The ryutei cast his gaze toward the prime minister, who was standing next to the houtei. He was a little over forty years old right now, which meant he'd have been in his twenties when the ryutei had died. He was older, but clearly hadn't changed so drastically that he couldn't be recognized.

"It's been fifteen years since our last meeting, and I've grown quite old. We were the same age once, so I never thought I'd be seeing you with older eyes... Ha ha ha ha, I feel far beyond my years just looking at you."

The prime minister let out a little laugh, though tears welled up in his eyes at the same time.

...Same age? Were they friends, maybe?

"Fifteen years, really? There's just no way..."

"We'll explain everything to you in due time. Please calm yourself down for now."

"...Okay," the revived ryutei mumbled, nodding his head slowly, his expression a mixture of confusion and obedience.

Whew... He was revived without a hitch. That's great. Guess I can leave the rest to these guys.

"I see... So that's really the case, then. Unless everyone here is conspiring to deceive me, it's truly fifteen years in the future..." the former ryutei, Tatsuma, muttered as he looked out upon the city from his window. From his perspective, it must have felt like traveling to the future.

"Tatsuma-sama!"

"I'm most surprised by you, Houka... To think that the mischievous little tomboy princess would blossom into this. The passage of time is a terrifying thing indeed."

"Terrifying?! I'm an adult now, you know?! That's not terrifying!"

Though the houtei puffed out her cheeks and grumbled, the former ryutei simply smiled. Apparently, the houtei was something of a rambunctious little girl, but now the two were the same age.

“So...what is to become of me now?” the former ryutei asked as he leaned back in his chair and turned toward the houtei and the prime minister.

“Well...we hoped that you would ascend to the seat of ryutei again, Tatsuma-sama.”

“But Houka, you’ve been houtei for fifteen years now, haven’t you? Would it not be out of place for me to suddenly take the throne again? I don’t even know anything about the state of the country, let alone the state of the world. I wouldn’t wish to be a naive or unwise ruler.”

“But Tatsuma-sama, you can learn!”

Though the houtei raised her voice in protest, Tatsuma held up his hand as if to ask her to stop and replied, “No matter the situation, the truth is this: the man known as Ryutei Tatsuma died long ago. It doesn’t make it acceptable for him to reclaim his throne just because he was reborn. If the first ryutei and houtei were to be revived, would you abdicate the throne for them? Would you give power over this nation to those from the past who know nothing of the present?”

“But...”

I could understand Tatsuma’s feelings, and the example he used was a reasonable one. He didn’t want to take the throne just because he happened to be alive again, not if it would be bad for his country.

“Don’t look at me so, Houka. Though I reject the throne, I will still support you as a member of the Ryu family. I will work for the sake of this nation as your loyal retainer.”

“Tatsuma-sama...”

The houtei had a mixed expression on her face. She glanced down. Apparently, the thought of Tatsuma being her retainer wasn't necessarily a happy one.

The former ryutei turned to me, bowed his head, and said, “I would like to extend my deepest gratitude for what you have done. Your kindness runs deeper than any could have ever requested. It is my hope that the Ryuhou Lands and your Duchy of Brunhild forge a strong and lasting friendship.”

Though his words sounded weighty, he had no actual power so long as he refused the throne. His hope for friendship didn't exactly mean anything on a national level. It was just an expression of his personal gratitude.

“That's right! Absolutely! The Ryuhou Lands shall never forget what you've done for us, Grand Duke! We'll aid you in any way we can, as both an ally and a friend,” the houtei stated, speaking up with words that had considerable weight, so I used the opportunity to request more moonbranch droplets. I was informed that collecting them would take a few days, so I'd have to come back later.

Ka-ching! More golden detox secured!

“Tell me, what is this golden elixir?” the former ryutei asked, interrupting my talk with the houtei... For a guy who'd rejected the throne, he was already keen to get involved in state affairs. I explained the situation to Tatsuma.

When I mentioned the drug and how it was spreading chaos through his country, the man raised a brow and exclaimed, “What?! Is that medicine you create the only known cure?!”

“For now, yeah. Though I can also cure it with the **[Recovery]** spell. However, the only ones I know who can use that are me and Elna...”

When I mentioned her name, Elna suddenly stood up behind me and raised her voice, saying, “U-Um...! Could you take me to anyone being affected by the elixir?! I-I can use my magic to help!”

“Oh, well... If you can cure them, I’d rather you did so supervised... The afflicted are...not quite mentally sound, you see... Some of them get quite delirious and lash out at those around them... It’s not exactly something for children to see...” the houtei replied, speaking in a somewhat ambiguous manner.

Honestly, I understood what she was getting at. The golden elixir wasn’t something that actually caused mental instability. It was just something that created a compound of curses within the body, which could have a variety of negative effects on the person affected. If it ate away at your mind, you became something like the walking dead. If your body ended up being affected alongside the mind, then you could transform into a monster like the Fishmen.

The houtei was probably somewhat concerned about Elna seeing some of the more grisly effects. I knew from experience that once the curse had fully taken root in a person, even **[Recovery]** would be useless... So really, Elna was right. We needed to help in any way we could, the sooner the better.

“Don’t worry. I’ll keep her safe,” Elze stated as she stood up and placed a hand on Elna’s shoulder. I decided to leave things to her and Elna here. Kousaka didn’t like it when I spent too much time in one country, after all. I had to go do my part in other nations as well, since that was another way for us to make some national revenue. Kousaka generally handled the financial side of things, though.

Just as I was about to take my leave, a member of the Ryu family entered the room with an apologetic bow. He approached Prime Minister Ryuzan, whispered something, then took his leave. The prime minister’s brow raised slightly in response to the whispering. I

wondered if something was wrong. Tatsuma called out to his aged-up friend.

“Did something happen?”

“No, not at all... We sent word to Tatsuya-sama of your awakening...but it would seem he declined to respond...”

“...Oh,” Tatsuma mumbled as he let out a small sigh.

...Tatsuya is Tatsuma's brother, right? You'd expect him to be a bit more excited, since his dead sibling came back from the dead. But given the reactions here, maybe they don't get along? I guess I'll stick around a little longer...

“Anyway, why don't I take you to the treatment center to perform the healing? We should leave Tatsuma-sama to rest...”

“No, I'll join you. I wish to see how the place has changed over the last fifteen years. I can't just stay cooped up here.”

Huh? You're tagging along?

I blinked in surprise. He'd been dead for the last fifteen years, but he was already raring to go.

“U-Um, Tatsuma-sama... Don't you think you should rest?”

“I'm not tired. Fifteen years may have passed for all of you, but that time held still for me. I'm quite well.”

“B-But you could at least eat...”

“I'll eat in town. Don't worry.”

The houtei seemed to be at a total loss, but Tatsuma looked more energized than anything else. The prime minister couldn't help but sigh and shake his head.

“Come! I'm no longer the ryutei! I can freely walk the streets at my leisure! How could I not jump at the chance?!”

Tatsuma was brimming with energy, apparently excited to go outside. I could understand his feelings there. Apparently, the leader of the Ryuhou Lands was supposed to stay cooped up in the palace and never had the freedom of mingling with their own people. Barely anyone outside the palace would even know Tatsuma's face, and anyone that did recognize him would surely think they were mistaken.

Tatsuma was to come with us to the treatment center as Prime Minister Ryuzan's escort. It was a bit funny to think about how their positions of power had been swapped. The houtei wanted to tag along as well, but the prime minister stopped her. That was to be expected. She was probably worried about Tatsuma, but rules were rules.

When we boarded the carriage, Tatsuma let out a little mutter, saying, "I never thought we'd reach the point where Houka would be fretting for my safety..."

"It's only fair to feel bewildered by all this. It's been fifteen years for us, but not for you. You've seen her grow into a young woman in what must have felt like the blink of an eye."

Prime Minister Ryuzan gave a somewhat strained laugh. From Tatsuma's perspective, the little girl he knew was now a full-grown woman capable of caring and being concerned for him. It must've been a shock. As a father to children who hadn't technically been born yet, I could somewhat sympathize.

"There seem to be many Gollems in Orphen," Kuon stated, making an observation as he spoke to Ryuzan, noting the townscape outside the carriage window. There were definitely quite a few Gollems in Orphen, though they all seemed to be mass-produced factory types rather than ancient legacy types. Most of the ones you saw were autonomous or vehicular.

“We did a lot of business with Isengard in the past. Most of them are imports from down there, at least. Of course, that came to bite us after they collapsed...”

The country may have been ruined, but there were still seafaring vessels that connected the two countries. The golden elixir was most widespread in Isengard’s ruins, and it had made its way to Orphen through those channels as a result.

It was no surprise to me that some had sought to profit from the illegal trade... But to be honest, the wicked devout that Yakumo had encountered probably had more to do with it.

“Since Isengard collapsed, our import of Gollems has halted. We’ve got no method of producing new factory Gollems either. There’s been something of a spike in Golem value lately, but it should stabilize as we reestablish a supply through Triharan.”

“...Hold on a second. Isengard has been destroyed? The magitechocracy is gone? Did Gardio wage war on them?” Tatsuma asked. He was understandably confused, as his knowledge of geopolitics was still firmly rooted in the past.

Prime Minister Ryuzan explained everything about what had happened in Isengard, including the emergence of the wicked god and the destruction of Isenberg. Upon hearing that it was me and my family who defeated the wicked god, Tatsuma’s eyes went wide with admiration.

Agh... I feel a little uncomfortable talking about my exploits in front of my kids, but... Ghhh... Wait, it’s not like I did anything wrong... I shouldn’t be ashamed...

Yumina and Elze were blushing, evidently as embarrassed as I was. Elna’s eyes were sparkling with pride for her parents. Kuon, on the other hand...was simply looking out the window. Taciturn as always, that boy.

“I see. So the remnants of this wicked god are now spreading this foul drug?”

“Sort of. It’s more like an offshoot group that has the power of the wicked god.”

I didn’t think the wicked devout had any direct connection to Yula or the NEET god. They were just a new group that had gained power by taking in the dregs left behind. That was what Granny Tokie had said, at least. It was basically a headache and a half that I had to mop up.

We continued talking until the carriage finally arrived at the medical center. Then, we disembarked to find a white building with two floors. It kind of looked like a clock tower, but there was no clock. The Ryuhou Crest was instead displayed where I would’ve imagined the clock to be, designating this place as a government-sanctioned treatment center.

From what I’d heard, this place was being used exclusively to treat people suffering from the golden elixir’s effects, but just to be on the safe side, I cast **[Prison]** around everyone I was with to prevent any transmissible diseases from entering their bodies.

“This way, please.”

We followed the staff through a long corridor. The place smelled like a hospital, disinfected and sterile. Eventually, we entered a large room filled with occupied beds...and the reality of the situation dawned upon me.

“The patients here have relatively mild symptoms. They are conscious ones who have given no indicators of violent behavior.”

I nodded slowly as the nurse explained things. I couldn’t really sense any life from the people in the beds. They were just staring at the ceiling with vacant eyes, the occasional gasp or moan leaking out of their throats.

I looked over at Elna. Her face was pale, her mouth was closed. She looked shocked by the sight, and I couldn't exactly blame her.

"...Elna, it's okay if you want to go."

"...No, I'm fine. I can do this. I can help them."

Elze seemed anxious for her daughter, but Elna simply shook her head. She then walked over to the nearest patient, holding out a determined hand.

"[Recovery]."

A soft light flowed from that steady hand, wrapping itself around the bedridden woman. The light eventually settled within her body, and she slowly stopped her absent muttering. The light in her eyes gradually returned as well. She blinked slowly and began to move her head.

"Where...am...I...?"

"Incredible! It worked!"

The hospital staff with us couldn't contain their shock as the bedridden woman slowly pushed herself upward. Tatsuma and Ryuzan seemed surprised as well, but Elna simply had a look of relief on her face. The look was shared by Elze, but I could sense she still had anxiety about the whole thing. It was understandable.

"Time to move to the next one, Elna."

"Mhm!"

I urged Elna toward the next patient. It would've been quicker for me to just mass target everyone and do it myself, but Elna seemed so keen to do it on her own that I didn't want to take that away from her. Elze seemed to feel the same way, which was why she didn't say anything.

One by one, Elna restored the vitality to the bedridden patients with her **[Recovery]** spell. I'd never personally thought about it much, but using that spell took a vast amount of magical power. The fact that Elna was capable of using it so much in quick succession was a testament to her magic. She was already far beyond the level of most court mages.

Elna had the aptitude for three types of magic: Fire, Water, and Light. Those were the same aptitudes shared by her Aunt Linze. She used Light-based restoration magic in combination with her **[Recovery]** spell to ease the pain of those she healed.

"It's good she's curing them and all, but is this really fine? Won't they just go back to using the drug again?"

Elze pondered something that I was also pondering. I didn't think it would be a problem, though. Most of the people who took the elixir did so under the pretense that it was a way to ward off the goldflower pox, and it didn't really have that deep of an addictive property to it. Plus, it was now known that the elixir carried a curse, so it was unlikely that people afflicted by that curse would go out seeking to get cursed again. Then again, there were those back on Earth who refused to stop smoking or drinking even when told to by their doctor...

"I recorded all of the patients before Elna set about curing them. It might be good for them to see what kind of state they were in before they're discharged," Kuon said, smiling faintly as he held up his smartphone.

...When did you do that?

He had a point, though. Seeing themselves in that sorry state might give them cause to never fall back down like that again.

"What if they still do it?"

“Isn’t that a problem for the Ryuhou Lands? They have to take responsibility for themselves at some point. They can’t just expect us to swoop in and save them all the time, you know?” Kuon replied, giving something of a harsh answer.

That’s pretty rough... Are you really six? I guess that’s right, though. We can’t just have them thinking we’ll come cure them every single time. There’ll always be brazen types who expect things for free, so we need to make it clear that this isn’t a handout situation. You can’t just get stuck in a loop of drug use and rehab.

I didn’t want them taking my daughter’s kindness for granted, that was for sure. What Kuon had said was definitely harsh, but ultimately fair.

Elna eventually finished curing everyone in the room, but the room only contained patients with mild symptoms. Apparently, the ones suffering more severe symptoms were isolated in the basement.

We were taken downstairs to the isolation ward by a nurse.

“Gah...”

I didn’t know who’d groaned, but I felt the same. To call this an isolation ward wasn’t quite right. It was more of a prison than anything. The patients were kept behind iron bars in cells of their own. Most retained their human forms, but some already had scales or other animalistic features growing on their bodies. Though their appearances varied, they were all transforming in some way or another. None of them were in their right minds either. Some patients were simply rocking back and forth in their cells, while others screamed and roared against their restraints.

Elna clung close to Elze, apparently scared by the sight.

“Are you okay, Elna?”

“I-I’m okay...”

Kuon seemed concerned for his sister, but I was pretty surprised that he was unfazed. Just how gutsy was this kid?

Elze and Yumina were keeping their cool, at least. Elze kept glancing around, while Yumina was quietly observing the patients.

“They only regain lucidity for a few hours every day or two. We use that time to try to treat them, but to no avail so far...”

The nurses here all seemed to be on the brink of collapse. Frankly, I could do nothing but commend their efforts...but they were dealing with a horrible curse here. It wasn't something healthcare providers could deal with. Still, there was something to be said about the fact that their patients regained their senses, even if it was only once in a while. Usually, the curse would've settled in entirely by this point, but these people were desperately fighting against it with all their power.

“Is it okay, Elna?”

“...Mhm. Just watch me, mother...”

Elze raised her voice in concern, but Elna shook her head and raised a wavering palm toward a nearby cage.

“[Recovery].”

“Oooh!”

The caged man, who had been half transformed into a fish monster, slowly transformed back into a regular person as the light enveloped his body. The nurses raised their voices in wonder at the sight.

When the light faded, the man fell to the floor. One of the nurses unlocked the cage and hurried in to check on him.

“He's alive! It's all right, he's just out cold!”

Elna smiled softly as the nurse reassured her. Elze smiled as well. I felt that this was a formative moment for Elna, like I was watching my daughter do something special or something.

Her initial success emboldening her, Elna began to purge the curse from the other caged patients. Everyone she cured ended up passing out, but all of them regained their human forms.

Thus, the golden curse soon found itself washed away from Orpheus, capital of the Ryuhou Lands.

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“Mmm! This tastes delicious, mother!” Elna exclaimed as she excitedly bit into a scoop of ice cream and fruit jelly, then immediately held out a spoonful to Elze.

Elze graciously accepted the offering, swallowing the sweet treat.

“Oh, wow! It’s really good!”

“Ha ha ha ha... I’m glad it’s to your liking,” Tatsuma, the man who’d shown us to the restaurant in the first place, chuckled softly as he watched the two of them eat.



I'd waved off the whole thing with Elna calling Elze mother as just a cute nickname. They bought the story easily enough, since nobody would expect Elze to have a daughter who looked so old. Easier to paint it as an affectionate nickname for an older sister figure than tell them the actual truth.

Kuon had no such issues, since he referred to his mother as Yumina and me as Grand Duke in public. Yumina wasn't exactly thrilled about that particular fact, but it was mighty convenient.

"I'm glad this place is still here, though the interior has certainly changed over the last fifteen years."

Once we were done at the treatment facility, Tatsuma offered to take us around the capital. Apparently, he was keen to stretch his legs for the first time in fifteen years. Then, when Elna mentioned she was hungry, he recommended we come here for something sweet.

It was definitely a retro-style place. It kind of reminded me of something straight out of the Taisho era. It was only retro-chic from my perspective, though. The people of Orphen would most likely view it as a fairly modern establishment.

"You were able to come here when you were the active ryutei?"

"I would disguise myself from time to time and leave the palace. I was quite good at it, I'll have you know."

"That caused me no manner of trouble in the past, you know? I always had to deal with the political fallout of your little jaunts on my own."

"...Oops. Let's forget I just said that."

Tatsuma chuckled lightly in response to Kuon's question, prompting Prime Minister Ryuzan to interject from the side. It was clear the two men had a close relationship.

"I used to bring Houka here a lot as well. Taking her out for treats was a small pleasure."

"The houtei is still fond of desserts, I'll have you know."

It was kind of a relief to know that a dignified leader like the ryutei also sneaked out of the castle from time to time. It made me feel less bad about doing it so much myself. I could almost hear the voice of Kousaka in my ears, chastising me for using my magic to run away from my paperwork, but I quickly shushed it.

"Still, I can't help but feel that dessert is an insufficient reward for all you've done..."

"You needn't worry about that. Your country is allied with ours, so it's only natural for us to assist. What else are alliances for?"

A fine statement indeed. It was just a shame that Kuon had said it rather than me.

...Son, can you let your dad handle the diplomacy? You're gonna make me look bad if a little kid's speaking on my behalf...

After we finished eating, we walked around, thinking of where to go next all the while. It had been fifteen years since Tatsuma had last walked around the capital, so he was understandably antsy.

"Has it changed that much?"

"It has. Old landmarks are gone, and new ones stand in their place. It's almost as if I'm in another place entirely, though that's to be expected after such a long time has passed. It's a bit hard to get used to, I must admit."

He must've felt like he'd been left behind by the world. Everyone he knew had gained fifteen years of life experience, while he'd stayed still. His anxiety was more than fair.

"Yet despite the uncertainty, I'm excited for what the future holds. I've been given a second chance at life, and that isn't something I'll take for granted. I want to see how things will progress."

...Damn. He's kind of like me. Died and came back, and now he wants to make the most of his second chance. I can't help but hope everything works out for the guy, just like it worked out for me.

"Hm..."

"Hm?"

...What was that voice? It interrupted my thinking.

Kuon caught my attention and tapped at the dagger sitting at his waist.

...Huh, Silver?

"Hey, kiddo's old man...don'tcha know we're bein' followed?"

"Huh?"

We are? I didn't sense anything like that at all... Don't tell me I'm losing my touch.

"It ain't a person followin' us, which is why you prolly couldn't tell. It's a Gollem. Been followin' us since we left that bakery. Keepin' a fine distance."

...Why would a Gollem be following us, though?

I didn't glance back to look, but I quietly had Kougyoku confirm what Silver was saying. There were some Gollems behind us, attending to their business in the streets.

Hmm... That's more than one, though. Which one's following us?

"S'bluish with armor and claws on its hands."

“Oh, that one.”

There was definitely a Golem behind us that fit that description...but why was it following us? On whose orders was it acting?

“...Should we grab it and make it talk?”

“Most Golems don’t have voice modulators.”

Gah... C’mon, Kuon, don’t clap back at me like that... It was just a figure of speech...

If it was just following us, then that was fine. I didn’t see the harm if it wasn’t doing anything else.

“...Who do you think it wants, father? You or Tatsuma? It could even be after the prime minister.”

...Hmm, that’s a good point. I can’t leave it be if it’s tailing us for nefarious purposes.

I decided to quietly tell Tatsuma and Ryuzan what was going on, while Kuon quietly informed Yumina, Elna, and Elze.

“So yeah, we’re being followed... Any ideas who could be behind this?”

“Well, I’ve some ideas, but I can’t say for sure... Neither the Ryu nor Hou families are entirely unified, so it could be from either group.”

Both Tatsuma and Ryuzan had troubled looks on their faces. Regardless, we hadn’t been harmed yet, so I just had to hope that would continue to be the case.

“There are some among us who were opposed to us joining the alliance and might have an ax to grind with Brunhild, and others aren’t too happy that Tatsuma-sama was revived. There’s also a faction that would gladly see me deposed from my own position as prime minister... There’s little I can really do to rein them in, unfortunately.”

If we didn't know who had dispatched our stalker, there wasn't a whole lot we could do.

Just as I was pondering our next course of action, Tatsuma raised an idea, saying, "What if we were to split up? There's a fork in the road coming. Ryuzan and I will take one path, while you and the others take the other. We can determine the target by finding out which of us the Gollem follows, no?"

That definitely sounded like a good way of determining whether this Gollem was after me or one of the other two. If the Gollem was after Tatsuma or Ryuzan, then we'd double back and catch it. If it was after me, I'd just turn around and blast it.

"Sounds like a plan."

I went to the back of the group and told Yumina, Elze, Elna, and Kuon about the plan.

"Hah, now that's more my speed. Can't I just smash the Gollem to bits, though?"

"Not until we figure out what it's up to. If it's just following us, we don't have cause to trash it."

Elze's maniacal expression made me a little nervous, so I made sure to tell her she was only allowed to break it if it attacked us first. Self-defense was the way to go here.

"We need evidence that the Gollem attacked first, so I'll be sure to provide video proof. Don't worry."

My son's calm manner unnerved me even further... Why was he so cool and collected all the time? He really was an odd duck.

I sighed softly before looking ahead and noticing Tatsuma and Ryuzan veering off toward an alley to the right.

As per the plan, the rest of us carried on moving straight.

With Kougyoku perched on my shoulder, I watched the stalker Golem as it followed us.

...Now, where are you gonna go?

To my surprise, a second Golem joined the first and headed down the alley.

Welp. Looks like that's their target.

"Let's double back, quick."

We headed back toward the alley that Ryuzan and Tatsuma had gone down. Then, we rounded the corner only to see the two Golems getting ready to tackle the men from behind. Just as I was thinking "Oh crap!" the two Golems suddenly stopped moving. It was as if time had stood still.

"Get away from them, quickly!" Kuon yelled out, prompting Tatsuma and Ryuzan to escape.

Oh! Kuon's using one of his mystic eyes to stop them dead in their tracks!

The Golems hadn't been frozen in time, they'd just been fixed in place. They clattered to the ground, still unable to move.

"Get down! It's dangerous!"

The second Kuon yelled that out, the two fallen Golems suddenly detonated. Dust and debris kicked up into the surrounding area. When the smoke cleared, there was nothing left but broken bits of machinery... Luckily, none of us were harmed, but I certainly was spooked.

"Suicide Golems... That was close. Good job on the warning, Kuon."

"My mystic eye granted me enough foresight to see what was about to happen. I caught a glimpse of the blast before it began..."

Damn, you're using a different power in each eye at the same time? Talk about skill...

"Amazing work, Kuon! Oh, you're even more quick-thinking than Touya! What a feat for my son!" Yumina exclaimed as she started doting on Kuon, patting and stroking his hair in an exaggerated manner.

I get being proud, but did you have to hit me with a diss in the process? It's not like I wasn't thinking quick either! I was gonna use [Teleport] to get rid of the Golems, but Kuon just happened to be faster, that's all...

"Are you two all right?"

"Y-Yes, somehow... I'm a bit scraped up, but not really worse for wear."

Tatsuma had fallen and grazed his elbows, but that was more than easy enough for Elna to fix with her healing spells. She was such a kindhearted girl...

Kuon cleared his throat before addressing Ryuzan and saying, "Those Golems were clearly sent to kill you and the former ryutei. Do you know of anyone who would want to see you dead?"

"My position as prime minister makes me a reasonable target, but as for Tatsuma-sama..."

Ryuzan was right. Tatsuma had been dead up until only a few hours ago, so there wasn't much reason for him to be targeted. Though, there could also have been a situation where Tatsuma's resurrection had caused problems and they were moving to nip it in the bud...

"Is there anyone who might not want Tatsuma around? Or anyone who might not want him to take the throne as ryutei?"

“Tatsuma-sama declared no intention to succeed the throne as ryutei, so there’s no reason for the Hou family to target him. I see no reason for the Ryu family to either... Unless... Tatsuya-sama?”

Tatsuma’s expression sank when he heard Ryuzan speak.

Tatsuya? Tatsuma’s younger brother? He’s not jealous that his big brother suddenly rose from the dead, is he?

“No, surely not. Tatsuya was a good boy, through and through. He was twelve years my junior, and I never had too much time to spend with him due to my duties as the ryutei, however...due to that, he gradually grew more distant from me over time. Before I knew it, he’d fallen in with a crowd I didn’t really like, and that only furthered the animosity between us... It reached the point where we had a poor relationship.”

“It’s true that Tatsuya-sama has something of a rough temperament, but surely he wouldn’t go to murderous lengths.”

It’s hard to say, honestly. I can easily imagine a dejected younger brother growing bitter in the shadow of his elder brother.

Then that bitterness would come undone when his brother died, only to find himself still compared to his elder brother even after that... He might have even wondered why his perfect brother had to die when a roughhousing brat like him stayed alive... And as a result, his hatred would fester, but he’d have no outlet to vent it because the brother he hated was already gone. Then, one day...his brother returned. How would that make him feel? His perfect older brother was back on the scene, reminding him of his own flaws...so he could’ve seen it as the perfect chance to get his revenge and bury his brother for good.

That was only a possibility, of course. It was just a theory of mine. Tatsuma could have just been targeted by a political enemy or something more standard.

“In any case, we need to move. The explosion is drawing attention, and it would be most troublesome if the guards were to come and question us. By your leave, Grand Duke.”

Kuon cleared his throat as he addressed me, suggesting he wanted me to warp us all away. The kid really was in control here, or at least, that was how it felt. I wasn't sure how to process him being so much better at diplomacy than me.

“**[Teleport].**”

He was still right, though, so I warped us back to the palace.

Okay, let's go speak to the houtei and figure this all out...

“...Tatsuya?”

Tatsuma's words caused me to glance over toward where he was looking, allowing me to catch sight of a man in his early thirties who was entering a carriage alongside a woman who looked to be in her early twenties. Both were dressed in ceremonial blue garbs, indicating their affiliation with the Ryu family.

The woman had deep blue eyes and long black hair. Despite her relaxed expression and beautiful face, her narrow eyes gave her gaze an intimidating sense of pressure. The man was tall and had a sturdy build. His black hair was cut short and he had a beard, but otherwise, his features resembled Tatsuma's.

His eyes went wide at the sight of Tatsuma, prompting a gasp to leak from his lips.

“Hnh?!”

A sense of bitterness clouded his face as he turned away and clambered into the carriage. The woman with him cast an unfriendly glare in our direction before following suit...and then, the carriage began to rumble away at full speed.

“Wait!”

Despite Tatsuma's cries, the carriage sped away in the blink of an eye.

"Was...? Was that...?"

"It was indeed...Tatsuya-sama."

Yep, figures.

I nodded at Ryuzan's words. It was the ill-behaved little brother I'd recently been told about. He looked just like Tatsuma.

"Shouldn't we go after him? If he sent those Gollems, I mean..."

"No. The Gollems are broken to bits, and we have no evidence. We can't just go casting random accusations out of nowhere like that. Besides, we're outsiders to the Ryuhou Lands, so it's best to let them take care of their own affairs."

"Huh? B-But, well..."

Elze recoiled slightly at Kuon's matter-of-fact explanation. He was right, though. It wasn't our business, so we had to let them take care of it. We could definitely give our testimony and help, however. If they wanted us to cooperate, we'd even do that. But acting of our own accord within another country? That was a no-go. We had to go through the proper channels, and that meant reporting to the houtei.

We entered the palace...and the woman in question came running up to us immediately.

"Welcome back, Tatsuma-sama! Wait, is something wrong?"

The houtei's cheery expression fell once she sensed something was off. When Tatsuma explained what had happened, her entire demeanor shifted rapidly.

“What?! Who would dare target you, Tatsuma-sama?! What monster would try to take you from me a second time?! I won’t forgive them!”

Her livid shouts were enough for me to stare at her wide-eyed, and her entire body was twitching with rage. Certainly a far cry from the excitable and happy girl she’d been only moments before... She banged her fists on the table, grumbling and yapping like an angered dog. Ryuzan was holding his head wearily, while Tatsuma looked somewhat unnerved. Perhaps noticing the improper nature of her outburst, the houtei quickly calmed herself down.

“Oh, uh... J-Just kidding, oho ho...”

...It’s too late to play it off as a joke, Houtei. Even my kids were shocked by your freak-out.

“Heh. You haven’t changed a bit, Houka. You used to throw little temper tantrums like that all the time when you were young.”

“N-No, it’s not like that! I just got a little agitated, is all!”

The houtei’s face turned bright red as she scrambled to make excuses. Something about her reaction made me realize something, or at least, it made me think I’d realized something.

I turned to Yumina and whispered, “...Yumina. Does the houtei have feelings for Tatsuma?”

Yumina blinked in surprise and replied, “...You only just noticed? It was blatantly obvious from the start... Honestly, Touya...you’re so inattentive at times.”

Huh?! Why are you looking at me like I’m slow on the uptake?! Was it that obvious?!

“Father... Come now...”

“Father...”

“You’re a real numbskull, Touya.”

My children, along with Elze, stared at me with a look that sat somewhere between dismay and wonder.

Leave me alone...

Yumina let out a quiet sigh that I really would’ve preferred she’d have kept to herself.

“...It was her love for him that drove her to go to such lengths to bring him back. Her anger is completely reasonable in the context of her being scared of losing him again, don’t you think?”

Oh, yeah. I can see that. The fear of losing someone you love can drive you to be pretty emotional, and in this case, she’s already lost him once.

“If someone was gonna take away someone I’d been pining after for over fifteen years, then I’d wanna hunt them down and smash their skulls in. That’s normal.”

Kuon and I shuddered slightly at the harsh imagery Elze had conjured up, but Elna nodded along in agreement.

“...You agree with her, Elna?”

“Love is all-or-nothing. I heard that girls in love are invincible, so there’s nothing to worry about. Just charge in and fight.”

“W-W-Wait, Elna. Who told you that?!”

“Auntie Karen.”

Gaaah! Karen, you idiot! What the hell kind of ideas are you feeding my daughter?! Don’t discuss love with her! It’s too early for that!

“So the houtei loves Tatsuma, and she wants to keep him safe...”

“Um...! Excuse me! C-Could you maybe stop talking about it?!”

“Ah...”

It was at that moment that I realized we'd been having this conversation in front of everyone. I noticed the houtei was now red as a lobster. She was staring at me with tears welling up in her eyes. Ryuzan was grinning widely as he looked over at Tatsuma, who was standing to the side and staring at the ceiling intently. His cheeks were also flushed red.

"W-Well, you know...I'm, um...grateful for what you did, Houka. Thank you, really."

"N-No, it's not a problem at all..."

It was as if the two of them were staring at each other in a new light for the very first time. Or maybe it was just the first time I'd noticed... Either way, they were definitely acting a little awkward around each other. It was cute, in a way.

Luckily, I was married. If I was single and saw a scene like that unfolding before me, I'd probably wish for them both to go to hell.

In any case, I was rather invested in their story now. I wanted to make sure they had the chance to be happy together.

◇ ◇ ◇

Clouds drifted through the night sky, parting every now and then to allow moonbeams their quiet and brief cascades. There were two palaces in Orphen. The Dragon Hall of the Ryu family and the Phoenix Hall of the Hou family. The palaces alternated as the seat of government depending on whether the ryutei or houtei was in power.

A shadow perched itself atop the opulent red roof of the Phoenix Hall, blending in with the night. The shadow slowly made its way across the wall to the courtyard, hopped down, and strafed up against the wall of the building. It then used a special tool to open up a nearby window and slip inside, moving with all the grace of a nimble cat.

This palace was the residence of the houtei. It was the seat of power for the Ryuhou lands at present. As such, it was well defended and had a regular rotation of guards. Yet despite this, the shadow slipped deeper into the building and skillfully avoided detection.

The intruder made their way to the room they'd been looking for, almost as if they knew exactly how to avoid the guard patrols. Once again, they deployed their specialized tool...opening the door with minimal effort.

The shadowy figure slipped into the room, taking care not to make a sound. It was a decently sized room that contained a desk, a chair, a closet, some bookshelves, and a three-quarter bed. The shadowy intruder slowly skulked toward the bed, peering at the face of the man who slumbered in it.

Moonlight shone through the window, illuminating the unconscious visage of Tatsuma, the former ryutei. A dagger gleamed in the moonlight as the figure raised it high into the air...

"All right, that's enough outta you."

...only to stop in their tracks as they felt cold metal placed against the back of their own neck.

The startled intruder slowly turned around to see a silver blade floating in the air, pointed directly at their throat.

"Scream or resist and you're done, got it? Drop the knife. I don't wanna make a mess in here, so ya better keep yer trap shut too."

The floating sword, Infinite Silver, forced the intruder to drop their weapon to the ground. The clattering and commotion woke Tatsuma, who narrowed his eyes at the sight of the intruder.

"...That boy was right, I see."

"Don't underestimate my kiddo. He's always a couple steps ahead. Good thing he left me here, eh?" the blade said, then laughed

coarsely as the former ryutei heaved a small sigh. Tatsuma couldn't exactly say anything back to the sword, since Silver was right.

"I'll go fetch someone..."

As Tatsuma rose from his bed, the shadowy figure reached down for his blade and moved to swing it again. Before he could attack, however, Silver flashed his own blade in an arc, striking the intruder, who fell to the ground in a heap.

"...Are they dead?"

"Naw. I'm on stun mode, so they're just conked out. If ya wanna get someone, you oughta do it now 'fore they wake back up."

"Got it."

Tatsuma pulled on a robe and left the room to fetch a guard.

Silver glanced down at the shadowy figure, the intruder clad in black ninja-like armor. He then used the sharp tip of his blade to slice away the mask that concealed the person's features, exposing their face to the light of the moon.

"Hm? No way... The kiddo even predicted that much?"

The sight caused Silver's body to rattle, giving off a vibration that felt like a very human sigh.

◇ ◇ ◇

Just as I was finishing up work for the night, I received a text from the houtei. Things had played out exactly as Kuon had anticipated. I thought it was a possibility, but Kuon was right on the mark in his prediction... Honestly, his efficiency made me feel a little disheartened.

"What's with that look?"

Leen, who'd been helping me with my paperwork, snapped me out of my stupor.

...Was my disappointment really that noticeable? Or is it just because we're married that she can tell?

"It's nothing, really... I was just thinking about how it's rough having such a capable son..."

"What nonsense are you spouting now? Sons are meant to surpass their fathers, so shouldn't you be proud of raising him well?"

"Well, I guess you're right."

Kuon would be the next duke of Brunhild, and it seemed like he was taking his duties seriously even at such a young age. I had a hunch I'd be retiring to Babylon sooner than I'd originally anticipated.

In any case, I had a text to digest. Tatsuma had been targeted, confirming that the Gollems had been after him rather than Ryuzan. I didn't think they'd launch two attacks on the same day, but that was probably the entire reason they'd done it.

Kuon had suggested leaving Silver behind as a guard, and that was definitely the right call. I'd also left Kougyoku with Ryuzan, just to be on the safe side.

According to the houtei's message, the situation was rather complicated, so she wanted me to stop by at my earliest convenience. That was fine by me, since I needed to collect Silver and Kougyoku anyway, and if they'd contacted me so late at night, then it must've been for an urgent reason.

Right when I was about to open up a **[Gate]** to the Ryuhou Lands, a knock came at the door to my office. Leen walked over to open it, revealing Kuon and Yumina. Yumina was wearing her pajamas, but Kuon was dressed for an adventure.

"Father, I'd like to accompany you to Orphen."

"Huh? How'd you know I was going?"

I doubted the houtei would've sent a text to Kuon about this, and I certainly hadn't seen him looped in on the recipients.

"I sensed that Silver had unsheathed himself. I can only assume something happened."

Oh, right. Silver's a crown, so it makes sense that he'd have a connection like that with Kuon, his contractor.

"I can't say I approve of my son going out so late at night like this, but... Well, if he's going with his father, I suppose it's fine," Yumina grumbled sleepily. It was normal to tell children not to go out late at night, but Kuon had spent many nights on the road before he'd even got here, so it felt a little late to start enforcing a rule like that.

I had no real objections to taking him with me, though. This was all thanks to him, anyway. Plus, there was an unspoken element of why I wanted to bring him with me. I didn't want him to think I was an uncool dad. Not that I needed to put on airs for my family, but still.

I left Yumina and the others in charge of affairs, then stepped through a portal to the Phoenix Hall. We were soon greeted by a group of officials and led toward a room within the deeper part of the palace. In the room stood Prime Minister Ryuzan, Tatsuma, and the houtei. They were standing by a pale woman who was in a nearby bed. She was unconscious, but breathing heavily, and there was a lot of sweat beading on her forehead.

Hm? Do I know her?

"Who is this?"

"Tatsuno. A servant and close personal aide to Tatsuya-sama."

My question was quickly answered by Ryuzan. That helped me place her. She was the narrow-eyed woman who I'd seen getting into the carriage with Tatsuya earlier.

So this is the assailant? Does that mean Tatsuya was behind all this?

Tatsuno herself was not a member of the Ryu family, but instead someone that Tatsuya had come across and taken a liking to. Ryuzan had no idea she was skilled as an infiltrator or assassin.

“She appears to be in poor health. Was there an issue when apprehending her?”

“That’s my bad, kiddo. I made a little oopsie, y’know?”

Silver, still in his sheath, perked up in response to Kuon’s question. Apparently, she’d woken up before Tatsuma had managed to come back with a guard, and she’d moved to stab herself with a poison needle that she’d kept concealed. Silver had noticed this and swung to disarm her, but the needle still managed to graze the woman’s finger. And unfortunately, that tiny dose of the poison was enough to render the woman comatose, so it was unlikely she’d live through the night. That was why they’d called me so urgently.

“[Recovery].”

I’ll just clear the poison from her body. Can’t have such an important player in all this dying on my watch.

The color immediately began returning to her face, and her breathing soon stabilized. I’d neutralized all the poison inside her, so she was beginning to recover.

“You think she was trying to kill Tatsuma?”

“That’s the most likely conclusion, yes. And it was likely done on another person’s orders...which means...”

“I’ve ordered some of our soldiers to find Tatsuya-sama. They’re only to question him, but they have orders to move to detain if he resists,” Ryuzan said, continuing the houtei’s train of thought.

Makes sense to me. If he's got nothing to hide, then he's got nothing to fear. But if he resists, well...

"...Was this really Tatsuya's doing?" Tatsuma asked, sighing quietly as he looked over at the woman on the bed.

The houtei, seemingly unable to endure his sad face any longer, raised her voice and said, "Much can change over the last fifteen years. Tatsuya-sama is still younger than you, even now. And ever since you passed away, he's taken great pains to raise his social status. He's one of the candidates to be the next ryutei, but even that isn't guaranteed, so he likely feels even less secure now that you've returned."

"You can't win candidacy for the throne based solely on good impressions, Houka. You have to be steady. You should know that as well as I, no?"

"That's true, but..."

In Orphen, where the Ryu and Hou families took turns ruling, there was still infighting among those families for who'd be their representative. That was simply unavoidable with the kind of ruling structure they'd adopted. If the question of succession was between a mediocre firstborn and a brilliant secondborn, then it was obvious that disputes would break out. If it was a matter of tradition, then the firstborn son would ascend. But if it was for the good of the country, then the secondborn should ascend.

As far as my opinions went, I would sooner have had the brilliant second son on the throne than the inefficient first. If it made the country worse, then what was the point in adhering to tradition? However, if the firstborn were merely an ordinary person rather than a mediocre fool, then I would want him on the throne with his brother supporting him. Being a genius wasn't a requirement for rulership, after all. You just had to not be a dumbass.

I'd talked about this kind of thing with my wives too. If my eldest son was not fit for the throne, then he wasn't entitled to it by default. Plus, I honestly didn't think Brunhild's leadership had to be beholden to my bloodline. After all, Brunhild itself just kind of fell into my lap. I didn't really earn my place on the world stage. If I happened to have an imbecile of a son who didn't deserve to carry on Brunhild's legacy, then it would have been better for the people to have a brilliant man from outside my family take his place.

Don't think I have to worry about that, though.

I glanced at my son with a small grin on my face. I was more worried about him being too good, frankly.

My thoughts were interrupted by the sound of heavy footsteps from the outside hall, as well as faint cries of "Halt!" or "Stop right there!" that grew closer until someone barged into the room.

"Tatsuno! Are you okay?! Is she safe?!"

That someone was none other than Tatsuya, Tatsuma's younger brother. The moment he charged into the room, he was seized by two guards who'd been stationed by the door.

"Calm yourself, Tatsuya-dono."

"Lady Houtei! They say Tatsuno was poisoned, is it true?!"

"It's true. She tried to kill herself with a poisoned needle, but the grand duke of Brunhild has already neutralized the poison in her body." Tatsuya heaved a great sigh of relief upon hearing the houtei's words. The houtei's eyes, however, were cold and glassy.

That was entirely reasonable. Someone she loved had almost died, and the prime suspect was sitting in front of her.

"Tatsuya."

Tatsuya flinched slightly upon hearing Tatsuma's voice. The guards held him in place, forcing him down to his knees as Tatsuma walked toward him.

"She tried to murder me... Suicide Gollems were sent after me... I'll ask kindly. Was that your doing?"

The man on the ground gulped quietly, staring at the floor all the while. After a few moments of silence, Tatsuya looked up at his brother and slowly opened his mouth to speak.

"...It was all me, yes. I ordered Tatsuno to do this."

The room went deadly silent, and I could feel the rage festering in the houtei's soul.

Tatsuma took a step forward as if to break her line of sight and asked, "Why?"

"...I was scared. I was scared of losing everything I'd built up, so I wanted to...put you back in the ground. I gave the order. Tatsuno simply obeyed it, so—"

"You're lying," Kuon spoke clearly, his words cutting off Tatsuya's. Kuon's right eye was gleaming with a silver luster, shimmering with the power he'd inherited from his mother.

"It's no lie! I ordered her to do it! I ordered her to kill my brother!"

"That's not true. You didn't order her to do it at all. If I had to guess, this was all her doing—"

"No! You're wrong! It's all me! It's all on me! I wanted her to kill him! I told her to kill him! His death was my fault in the first place! It wasn't Tatsuno!"

"...What do you mean by all this, boy?" Tatsuma turned to Kuon with a curious gaze.

“I don’t know the specifics, but I believe he’s saying this to protect her. I think the attempt on your life was orchestrated by her alone. Perhaps even the suicide Golems were her doing.”

“No, brother! Please! I orchestrated the entire thing! Pin it all on me, even if it means the death penalty! Leave her out of this!”

Tatsuya bowed his body forward, reaching out his arms to cling to his brother’s legs. The entire room fell silent, bewildered by the sight of the blubbing man. Even the houtei, who’d previously been bubbling with rage, now seemed more confused than anything else.

Since neither she nor Tatsuma seemed ready to speak, I spoke up in their stead and asked “...You said his death was your fault in the first place? What does that mean? Wasn’t his death an accident?”

“...It wasn’t. The collapsed altar was my doing... I wanted to scare Houka, so...”

“...Me?”

At the mention of her name, the houtei blinked in further confusion.

“...It wasn’t supposed to be dangerous. It was just a prank. The thing was meant to fall just before Houka came to the altar, but it didn’t. I thought it was a dud, and then it happened to collapse during the ceremony itself. My elder brother died protecting her from it... If I hadn’t done that, he’d have never died!”

Tatsuya wailed out his confession as tears streamed down his face. The revelation only served to further stun everyone. I could understand why. The truth behind the death of the ryutei being a childish prank? That was a lot to digest.

Slowly, Tatsuma opened his mouth and asked, “...Why would you try to scare her?”

“I was... I was jealous... You always had time for her... You always took her places and taught her things...”

“She was set to be the next houtei... I had to teach her those things. It was part of my leadership duties...”

“I know that, I do. But your attention was always on her, so I felt like you didn’t want me around... I thought that if I could get some petty revenge by frightening her, I’d at least feel like I could do something about it...”

Childish envy? I guess he would’ve been eleven or twelve at the time. That’s kind of a normal reaction for a kid his age. Maybe he saw the young houtei-to-be as someone who was stealing his big brother?

“Did Tatsuno know that?”

“No, there’s no way she’d have known... But she asked about my strange behavior when I learned you’d returned from the dead. She must have assumed your presence stood in my way...”

According to Tatsuya, Tatsuno was once a member of the black market’s shadow guild. She’d found herself on the verge of death once that organization had been destroyed, only for Tatsuya to save her life. She must have felt she was repaying her debt to him in some way by taking matters into her own hands...

“...I see now that my selfish thoughts brought you further suffering, Tatsuya-sama...”

“Tatsuno!”

Tatsuno, who’d apparently been awake enough to hear the whole exchange, slowly rose from her bed. The nearby guards charged forward, forming a wall between her and us. Them being on high alert was understandable, given she’d tried to kill Tatsuma only an hour prior.

“...You heard all of that?”

"I was conscious, but unable to move... I had no choice but to listen..." Tatsuno, whose hands were tied together in cuffs, said as she slumped out of the bed and prostrated herself before the houtei and Tatsuma.

"This was my doing...and mine alone. There has been no wrongdoing on Tatsuya-sama's part. Please, lay any and all punishment upon me..."

"No! If I'd simply talked to my brother immediately and told him how I felt, then Tatsuno would never have done this! I wanted to speak to you, but I was afraid of facing what I'd done! Please, Lady Houtei! I beseech you! Do anything you want to me, but leave Tatsuno out of this!" Tatsuya exclaimed as he fell to the floor and prostrated himself alongside Tatsuno.

Man...this could've all been solved if they'd just talked things out, huh?

"Houka... No, Lady Houtei."

Tatsuma stood silent for a while before finally turning to the houtei and bowing before her. He eventually fell just as prostrate as the other two. The houtei's expression faltered as she saw him bowing so deeply before her.

"It was my own shortcomings as an elder brother that wrought this tragedy. I beg you to pardon him for his role in my death...and I beg you to pardon her for her role in the attempt... From the bottom of my heart, please."

"B-Brother, you don't have to go that far!"

"...I can at least do one thing as your elder brother, can I not? Tatsuno must mean a great deal to you. I can swallow my pride and beg for something like that."

"Hngh... B-Brother, I... I'm so sorry... I..."

Tatsuya openly wept as he pressed his head to the ground. Tatsuma, on the other hand, smiled softly in the face of the apology.

The houtei let out a deep sigh before turning to the prime minister and asking, "Ryuzan. You were involved in all this as well. What say you?"

"Hm, well...accident or not, Tatsuya-dono was responsible for the death of our most recent ryutei. Tatsuno-dono then tried to murder him upon his revival. Ordinarily, such crimes would be punished with death, but the victim in both cases has made a personal appeal, even going so far as to beg you for their forgiveness. We cannot pretend the incidents never happened, but we can lessen the punishment. I would strip the two of any property and titles they own and have them exiled from our nation."

"Very well, then. The two of you shall henceforth be exiled from the Ryuhou Lands. You have three days to leave Orphen, and you will not be allowed to return. Is that understood?"

"Y-Yes, thank you!"

Tatsuno and Tatsuya kept their heads lowered as they spoke in unison, their voices muffled by tears. It didn't feel like a particularly lenient sentence, but perhaps it was the best they could've hoped for. After all, so long as they had their lives, they were free to begin again...together.

"...Did I perhaps overstep my bounds tonight?" Kuon hesitantly asked, whispering directly into my ear.

Had he not interfered with his mystic eye, Tatsuya would have been fingered as the mastermind and Tatsuno would have been convicted of her attempt to kill Tatsuma. They would've both surely received the death penalty. With that in mind, this was a far better outcome. I didn't think exposing the truth was necessarily the right call in every single instance, but Kuon had done a good job today.

I quietly, and proudly, stroked a hand through my son's hair. He'd done well.





Interlude: When You Wish upon a Star

“Ah, another one.”

“Huh? Where?”

I returned from my post-dinner bath to find my children sitting out on the balcony talking to each other.

I came outside to see what all the fuss was about, only to find them all gazing up at the night sky.

What’s going on here?

I looked up at the sky, but there was nothing particularly amiss. The moon was hidden, and there were a bunch of twinkling stars. There wasn’t much air pollution in this world, so you could see the stars just about anywhere. That wasn’t the case back on Earth. I didn’t recognize any of the constellations, but it was still a pleasant sight. I almost felt like I was being sucked in by the twinkling lights.

“Ah, look! Another one!” Linne exclaimed as she pointed her finger up to the sky. I followed her finger and saw a shooting star falling toward the ground in the distance.

I think I saw on TV once that shooting stars are a gathering of space dust and other particles from comets that burn up in the atmosphere... But isn’t this world flat? Maybe the stars are literally falling down here. Also, what are the stars I’m looking up at in the distance anyway? Are they different from the stars I’d look up at from Earth? Or maybe they’re other worlds? I hope none of them are literally falling toward us...

Part of me was worried that the shooting stars above could be worlds being annihilated by the god of destruction.

Surely not...

However, the more I dwelled on the thought, the more real the idea seemed. I decided to stop thinking about it. They were just shooting stars. Regular shooting stars. That was all there was to it.

“There’s been a shower of shooting stars for a little while now.”

“Oh yeah?” Elna’s words made me glance upward, and I soon saw another shooting star swoosh across the sky.

Then I saw another one...and another one.

A meteor shower, perhaps? No, I think meteor showers are supposed to have a more random pattern... Don’t tell me this really is the god of destruction at work... Nah, can’t be. Maybe there are star spirits up there playing around or something...

“Oh, missed it again... They’re going by too quickly...”

“They say if you make a wish three times before a shooting star vanishes, it’ll come true. You might not have enough time though...”

“Wait, really?!”

Linne suddenly freaked out and got excited after I finished talking to Frei. It wasn’t just Linne; the other kids suddenly crowded around me with curiosity burning in their eyes. Even Yakumo seemed interested. The only one who didn’t really react was Kuon, but all my daughters looked like they could barely contain their interest.

“Oh, uh, it’s just an old folk story...”

The kids just ignored me and started looking up at the sky, staring so intently that they refused to blink.

They’re buying into it that hard?!

Just as I started regretting my muttering, a huge shooting star streaked across the sky.

“I wish for a legendary katana, I wish for a legendary katana, I wish for a legendary katana!”

“I wish for a rare weapon, a rare weapon, a rare weapon!”

“An interesting magical tool! A magical tool! A magical tool!”

“An unknown instrument, unknown instrument, unknown instrument!”

“Exotic cooking ingredients! Exotic ingredients! Exotic ingredients!”

“A giant stuffed toy... A giant stuffed toy... A giant stuffed toy...”

“An awesome finishing move! An awesome finishing move! An awesome finishing move!”

Yakumo, Frei, Quun, Yoshino, Arcia, Elna, and Linne wished with all their hearts. Whether it was fortunate or unfortunate was up for debate, but I heard all of them.

“Our wishes will come true, right?!”

“Uhhh, no... I mean, uh, sure...”

When faced with the smiling faces of my daughters, I couldn’t say no.

Quun’s sly grin, Frei’s smirking face, and Yakumo’s concerned look led me to believe those three knew the star wishes weren’t real, however. But I still wanted to grant them.

Damn it... I have to sort all these wishes out now, don’t I? Like Christmas presents or something... I turned to look over at Kuon, who hadn’t joined the crowd.

“...Nothing you wish for, Kuon?”

“Not particularly. Oh, darn. I should’ve wished for world peace. My mistake.”

What a good boy you are!

I smiled a little at my thoughtful son before turning my mind toward granting the wishes of my children.

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“The easiest one to get right now is the giant stuffed toy Elna asked for...”

I looked over the wish list I’d noted down on my phone. A stuffed animal sounded easy enough, but just how giant did she want? I’d seen stuffed bears on TV before that were so big they filled up an entire room...

“I can’t use **[Modeling]** for this, so I might have to get it commissioned... Wait, how about the workshop? I could have it made there.”

If you had the right materials, Babylon’s workshop could produce anything you could conceive of. Well, not food. Or medicine. Or just about everything biological. So not *anything*.

In any case, I needed to figure out what kind of stuffed animal Elna wanted. The logical place to start would be with her mother, Elze.

“A stuffed toy for Elna? She makes them herself along with Linze when they sew together. I’m sure if she wanted one in particular she’d just make it herself.”

When I explained the situation to Elze, that was all she said to me.

Hmm... I guess I could just make a gigantic version of whatever her favorite one is, then?

I glanced over to the corner of Elze’s room, noticing a pile of stuffed toys. They were all different shapes and sizes, but none were especially gigantic. There were plush versions of Kohaku, Luli, Sango, Kokuyou, and Kougyoku, as well as more regular animals like dogs, cats, birds, and bears.

“Hm? What’s this?” I mumbled as I spied a couple of unusual animals in the pile.

“...A giraffe and a penguin?”

Neither of those animals existed in this world.

“Oh, those. Remember when we went to that zoo on our honeymoon? Linze took some photos of the animals there, they’re based on those.”

Oh, so that’s how she knows about them. Now there’s a good idea, how about an animal from Earth. I bet if I make a giant plushie of one of those, she’ll love it. The only question is what animal should I make... Naked mole rats are certainly rare, but I have a feeling that might just make Elna cry. How about a panda? They’re the most popular zoo animal out there!

There weren’t any pandas at the zoo we went to on our honey, so it’d be new to Elna. Plus, it was basically just a recolored bear, so it wouldn’t be difficult to make. Also...a big plush panda would just be a plushie version of a giant panda.

I looked up plushie pandas on my phone and there were quite a lot of them to reference. One of those would be more than enough for Elna to cuddle up with.

Great! Time to head to the workshop and get this stuff made.

“No sir, I’m not sure this is such a good idea.”

“Huh? What’s wrong?”

Rosetta’s words took me by surprise.

“The workshop can replicate just about anything, yessir it can. But original productions? That takes time and resources. Remember when we made your unique Frame Gears from scratch?”

Oh yeah, good point. When we made Brunhild Castle here, we used Belfast Castle as a base so I guess that wasn’t from scratch either.

“Can’t you use these photos as a reference, though?”

“No sir. If we don’t have good details to work with, it’ll come out strange. You don’t want a stuffed toy with poor-grade materials,

right?” Rosetta said, then shook her head as I showed her my smartphone.

Hm, I definitely don't want it to be flimsy or low quality... But I don't have any three-dimensional images of what I'm after...

“Sir! All I need is a regular stuffed animal to work from as a base, sir! If you have ma’am Linze produce a smaller one, I should be able to have the workshop enlarge and duplicate it, sir!”

“Oh, good idea!”

That was a smart way to go about it. I was thinking I’d have to find a bunch of different-angled photos of a real panda and splice them together, but this was much simpler. A cutesified doll version of a panda would probably be better than a photorealistic plushie anyway.

I left the workshop and went to find Linze. As luck would have it, none of the children were with her, so I quickly explained the situation.

“Ah, I see. So you want me to make a toy panda?”

“Yeah. A cute one, if you can. Think that’d be possible?”

“Of course, I should be able to do that... But what about the fine details? I don’t know what panda tails look like, and such...”

I’d shown Linze the pictures of the toy pandas on my phone, but they were all frontal views.

...Do pandas have tails? I guess they do, right? Aren't they round like rabbit tails? Wait, are they black or white?

I quickly ran a search for panda tails, and apparently, they were generally white. Then, I showed a few photos of actual pandas to Linze as well, just so she’d have a little creative inspiration when putting together her plushie.

“That should be enough for me to work with. You can let me know if I need to make any adjustments afterward.”

Linze began taking out various cloth materials, threads, needles, cotton stuffing, and a set of sewing scissors from her phone’s **[Storage]** app. She wasted no time at all, cutting through the fabric immediately.

What the heck?! Don’t people usually draw out the shape they want to cut before starting the cutting?!

“The shape is just a basic bear, no? I’ve made dozens of toy bears at this point, so there’s no need for me to draw out the shape.”

Damn, talk about experience... I guess pandas are bears though, so fair enough...

I stared on in stunned silence as Linze’s deft hands sliced through the cloth with her scissors. Once the cutting was done, she began to expertly run a needle and thread along the edges, stitching them together exactly where she needed them.

I’ve never seen anyone sew so fast and so precisely before... I guess it makes sense, though. Linze spends most of her afternoons making clothes for the kids. Maybe it was wrong of me to expect anything less than this.

She formed the head, torso, arms, and legs in no time at all, stuffing them with cotton until they were well and truly rounded out. All the parts were then stitched together, resulting in a cute little panda that sat on the floor in front of me.

“All done.”

Hey, hold on a sec... That didn’t even take you ten minutes! That’s insane!

In all honesty, maybe I didn’t even need the workshop. Maybe Linze could just put the giant panda together by herself...

I was still blinking in disbelief when Linze handed me the finished product.

“Does it look right to you?”

“Oh, uh... It looks good, yeah...”

I flipped over the panda in my hands, observing every detail I could think of. If she’d told me she’d actually bought this at a gift shop and tricked me into thinking she’d made it, I’d have believed her. It was the kind of professional quality toy you’d find at a zoo on Earth.

I didn’t want to ask Linze to make the giant one because I didn’t want to put all the pressure on her. It was my predicament in the first place, anyway. It would be better to have something new in the workshop’s existing blueprints anyway.

Before leaving, I made sure to tell Linze not to breathe a word to Elna, then I headed back to the workshop with the toy panda in tow.

“Sir! This is the plushie panda, sir?! I see... I see... It sure is plenty cute, sir!”

Rosetta took the toy panda from me and tossed it into one of the workshop boxes, where a whirring machine began scanning it.

Linze had given me some cloth and other stuff for making toys, so I tossed those into the material repositories. I didn’t include cotton as the filling, though. Instead, I opted for something harvested from a particular monster, it was somewhat similar to that bead-like material found inside bean bag chairs. They were the perfect kind of filling, creating a soft material that you could just sink into. I didn’t want to spoil my daughter, but I couldn’t pass up the chance to give her something incredible.

Just as I was pondering how long it might take, an enormous box sprouted out of the workshop’s floor. It popped open, revealing a

massive stuffed panda that looked remarkably similar to the one Linze had made.

“It’s... It’s huge... Wait, isn’t this way bigger than the real thing?”

“It is, sir! But pandas don’t exist in this world, so nobody’s going to notice, sir!”

I guess...

I leaned in against the panda, and immediately I felt myself sinking into its soft fur. I was swallowed up by the cozy embrace of the plush beast.

Ahhh! This is amazing! So soft... So warm... Ah... I don’t wanna get up ever again...

“Master, sir! Get it together, sir!”

“Ack!”

...Oh dear. I nearly fell asleep. I might’ve made a terrifying weapon... This is a lethal panda...

In any case, Elna’s wish had been granted. It was time to move on to the next wish.

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Yakumo had wished for a legendary katana, while Frei had wished for a rare weapon. They were basically the same thing, so I decided to handle them both at once. Thankfully, I knew a resident expert when it came to unusual weaponry.

“Oh, so that’s why you’re here.”

“That’s why I’m here, yep.”

King Felsen nodded and crossed his arms. This man was the biggest weapon maniac I knew, so it was a simple matter of opening up a [Gate] and popping over to his kingdom for some advice.

Once I explained the situation, his expression was a little stiffer than I'd expected.

"A legendary katana and a rare weapon, eh...? That may be harder than you were hoping for."

"Huh? How come?"

He was a weapon collector like Frei, so I assumed he'd have some easy leads.

"Well, if I had any leads on such things, I'd surely go after them myself. And if they were in my collection, Grand Duke, I'm not sure I'd easily give them up...even for you."

"Oh, I see."

...Goddamn weapon junkies. You're all the same.

"Well, hold on. Putting the legendary katana aside, shouldn't making a rare weapon be a trifling matter for you?"

"What do you mean?"

"A rare weapon needn't be a weapon with a story behind it, or one wielded by some great hero. It only needs to be something peculiar, at least that's how I see it."

...Oh. I hadn't even thought about it from that angle. So Frei's request doesn't have to be anything historic or made by some master craftsman, huh? Guess it's fine even if it's made by me, so long as it's something unusual.

But that begged the question, what to make? I had a feeling that making her a gunblade or a pile bunker weapon like we had on Gerhilde wouldn't quite cut it... I didn't think cobbling together a baseball bat with nails embedded into it or making a multishot gun would count either. They'd count as rare weapons in certain games, but that probably wasn't what she was after.

She'd probably have been more interested in the kind of weapon that required some special technique to wield, or a weapon that had terrible aim but incredible power. The kind of weapon you'd find in a daring tale of chivalry.

Hmm... I guess I should just try searching...

I took out my phone and ran an image search for daring, chivalrous weapons. There were a lot of results...

Oh? This one seems interesting. I bet I could get it to work well with [Program] too.

"...Is all well?"

"I was just thinking about what to make..."

I noticed King Felsen taking a sneaky peek at my phone screen. I'd inadvertently caught his interest.

"...You couldn't make one of those for me, could you?"

"I don't mind making you one, if you can pay. I won't give it to you for another six months either."

"Hm? Why the wait?"

"The request's for a rare weapon. If you have one too, then it won't be rare enough for Frei. She'll be disappointed about it."

It was plain from my perspective that Frei definitely wanted bragging rights. She respected King Felsen's collection, so having something he didn't have would be a point of pride for her.

"Hmh... I can't say I don't know the feeling... Very well, then."

"Now we've got that sorted, are you sure you don't know anything about a legendary katana?"

"Hmh... I don't know right now. It might be best to ask Lord Tokugawa of Eashen, don't you think? If anyone would know about unique katanas, it would be a man from the far east."

Oh, good idea. Tokugawa probably has a bunch of rare katanas or something.

First up, however, I decided to make Frei's rare weapon. Thus, I started work right in front of King Felsen, since I couldn't be bothered to move. I could just grab the materials from **[Storage]**, and having King Felsen there to gauge his reaction would give me a good idea of how Frei would feel about it.

*Let's see... Mithril should work. I'll use **[Modeling]** to warp the base form.*

"Hm? A sword?"

"Swords are always reliable, right?"

It wasn't just any old sword, however. This one was special. Once I'd shaped the sword, I separated the blade from the hilt. Then, I began slicing the blade itself into various segmented parts.

...It's meant to be like this, right?

"...Grand Duke, what in the world are you doing? Why is the blade in pieces?"

"It's a sword that also functions as a whip, you'll see."

King Felsen looked on with curious eyes as I put together the segmented blade. I'd gotten the sizes right, so now I just needed to join the mithril bits together.

*Just gotta make holes in each part so I can feed a mithril wire through the middle, then... Wait, no... The blades need to be fixed in place or the centrifugal force will just make all the segments clump up at the tip. Looks like I'll have to connect every individual bit with mithril wire, can't just use one long length... Then I can just use **[Program]** on the wire to make it extend and retract at will. Awesome.*

After a whole load of trial and error, I finally completed my first prototype whipsword. We then headed over to the Felsen castle courtyard to test it out.

“Hup...”

I pressed the button on the hilt as I swung the sword and the blade suddenly split and stretched out like a whip midswing. After that, I pressed the button again.

Schwing!

The sound rang out as the whipsword pulled back, reforming itself into...a big mess. The sword had not taken its original shape, various parts were now overlapping each other. What I was wielding could barely be called a sword at all, it was just a hunk of twisted metal, honestly.

...Crap, I forgot to include reforming to the base shape in the [Program] sequence...

I ran the spell again, adding that it needed to take its original form and harden itself when reverting.

All right, let's try that again.

I swung it out like a whip, then retracted it back into its base blade form. It worked perfectly.

I pulled out a large tree log from [Storage], set it on the ground, and stood a short distance away. I then used the whip form to lash the log and cast it high into the air, then switched it back to sword form and sliced the log in two as it fell back to the ground.

Great. Both forms work without any issues.

“Grand Duke! Me too! Let me try too!”

King Felsen could barely contain himself as he ran toward me, making grabby hands in my general direction. The sight was

terrifying, in all honesty. I let him play with the whipsword, and he began lashing it around as if he were playing with a new toy.

“You can’t have it, you know?”

“I-I know that! Six months, I know! B-But can you make mine a bit bigger? It’d suit me better that way, I think.”

If I make it any bigger, it’ll be harder to use as a whip... But I guess some things are better left unsaid. These kinds of weapons aren’t meant to be practical, they’re just meant to be cool. It’s fine.

That was that for Frei’s wish, so now I just had to grant Yakumo’s. A trip to Eashen was in order. A katana sounded like just the right thing for Yakumo, and Ieyahsu would surely have some knowledge of that variety of legendary blade. Thus, I thanked King Felsen for his assistance and opened up a [Gate] to Oedo.

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“A legendary katana, you say? I know of many, but most are owned. A blade is a samurai’s soul, and few men part with their souls.”

“Mmm, I guess that’s true...”

Dammit. I’m getting nowhere here. If Yakumo just wanted a rare katana, I could’ve had some master smith make one...but she specifically wanted a legendary katana, which means it needs to be one with some fame or history to it... Ieyahsu’s right, though. Few legends are willing to part with their own legendary arms.

“However, only most are owned. Some legendary blades have no owner...”

“No owner? How so?”

Ieyahsu’s words caused me to raise my brow. If he knew of any that didn’t have any owners, then that was exactly what I needed.

“I refer to the blades of the deceased, or blades that have since gone missing. Oda Nobunaga’s hoshi-kiri tachi, for example. Its

whereabouts are unknown. I was under the impression that Akechi Mitshuhide had taken it after his betrayal, but seemingly not.”

...Hoshi-kiri tachi? Haven't I heard of that before? Didn't Nobunaga give that to his son, Nobutada? The Earth Nobunaga did, at least. Maybe this one didn't.

I asked Ieyahsu about that, but apparently, Nohbunaga's son had died with him in a fire. History had played out differently, as I'd suspected. The history of Eashen had some similarities to Japan, but there were some notable differences. I decided not to worry about it. After all, the elite four of Takeda were working under me in Brunhild. That was definitely a major divergence from the history I knew.

“Know where I can find it, then?”

“I am afraid not. Stories say that Mitshuhide's retainers stole it amid the confusion and hid it. Though it may have burned alongside Lord Nohbunaga as well.”

“Have you seen the sword before?”

“That I have. Lord Nohbunaga showed it to me before his death. It was a beautiful katana, wrought of gleaming gold and silver with a beautiful mithril star adorned its guard.”

Hmm... If I run a search using those specific details, I just might be able to find it.

I had a feeling Yakumo would be very happy if I could get her a sword that once belonged to Nohbunaga Oda of all people.

“Run search, hoshi-kiri tachi... Oh, found it. Lucky me.”

My smartphone picked it up immediately. I grinned as I glanced upward, only to find Ieyahsu staring at me in abject disbelief.

“...Enigmatic as ever, Touya-dono...”

“Ha ha ha... That’s, uh... Ha ha ha ha...”

“...Would you mind searching for any undiscovered gold mines within my territory while you’re at it?”

“...Sure, why not.”

Just the kind of request I’d expect from a Sengoku era legend. Always trying to keep a stranglehold on his nation’s wealth.

I decided to run the search for him, since I didn’t just want to get the info, say bye, then poof away without another word. I found a reasonably sized gold vein not too far from Oedo, then told him exactly where to locate it.

He was still smiling when he saw me off through my **[Gate]**.

This world’s Nobunaga, Nohbunaga, was killed at Honno-ji, in Kyo. It sounded similar to the Honno-ji affair from Earth, but it wasn’t quite the same. Close enough, though.

So one of Mitshuhide’s people probably did hide it away somewhere and never came to retrieve it, huh?

I headed toward where the pin had fallen.

“Uhhh... It’s here?”

I stood on the grounds of Honno-ji, where Nohbunaga had breathed his last. The pin on the map pointed toward a small pond a little outside the building.

...Someone hid it in there? Sheesh. It’s been a long time since the temple was burned, so whoever hid it probably died before they could come back to retrieve it. That monkey...Hideyooshi, took care of Akechi’s army, so whoever hid it probably died then... But it’s in a pond, huh...? What should I do? Oh, I know.

“**[Gate]**.”

I opened up a portal at the bottom of the pond and dumped out all the water into a faraway spot above the sea. The water drained out of the pond in no time at all, leaving a soggy, muddy pit. I'd seen something like this happen on a TV show once, so it was fun to try it out. I'd only drained the water, so fish and other creatures were flapping about here and there.

Even though the water was gone, I couldn't see anything that looked like a sword. The mud at the bottom was kind of obscuring some stuff, though. I wondered how the guy who threw it in there was planning to retrieve it in the first place. I cast **[Fly]** to hover over the pond, then used **[Search]** to pull up a more detailed approximation.

"Oh... It's under here, I think?"

I cast **[Earthwave]**, a weak Earth spell, and moved the mud around until I caught something glimmering back at me.

There it is!

I reached down my hand and pulled the sheathed katana from the mud, using a quick Water spell to clean it off. The mithril star I saw soon after was enough to dispel any possible doubts I might've had. It was the hoshi-kiri tachi.

I pulled it from its sheath, and the blade shimmered beneath the sun. The water droplets caught the light too, creating a beautiful sight. Even a total layman could see that this sword was something special. It had been at the bottom of a pond for years and wasn't rusted at all, so the blade was probably made of mithril. I noticed a little bit of damage on the grip, but that was nothing the workshop couldn't fix up.

"Sweet. That's Yakumo's wish. Now for Quun, Yoshino, Arcia, and Linne. I guess the next easiest one would be Yoshino's wish for an unknown instrument."

It sounded easy at first, but then I wondered just what instruments didn't Yoshino know. I was sure she knew every single one that existed in this world.

That could only mean one thing. It needed to be an Earth instrument. However, I'd already introduced a lot of those to this world...

"I guess I just need to think of a really uncommon one, then... Something you wouldn't see much back on Earth..."

I pulled out my phone and looked up unusual instruments. There was a surprising amount of them.

The vibraslap seems interesting... It's a percussive instrument that goes like... Kaaaaaah!

It was certainly unique, but I wasn't sure if Yoshino would be happy with it. When compared to what I'd put together for Frei and Elna, it certainly came off as a bit simplistic...

Hmm... The cajón? It's another percussive instrument. A box with holes in it that you can tap all over... Maybe this one's a little simplistic too. Oh, how about...? Aha, now this one seems good. I've certainly never seen one before, and it doesn't look like an instrument at a glance. I bet Yoshino's never heard of this one either. All right, this one seems good to me. I can't make it myself, though. Way too complicated. Gonna have to ask Doc Babylon for help.

With that, I headed back to Babylon.

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"Is that really a musical instrument?"

"It is."

I was in the research laboratory, showing a video to Doc Babylon. On the screen projected in the air, a woman was playing the instrument by wiggling her fingers as she held them up. One hand was vertical and the other was horizontal. It was the world's first electronic

instrument, the theremin. It played sound without even being touched. I had no idea how the electronic component worked. I knew that the vertical pitch antenna controlled the pitch, while the horizontal volume antenna controlled the volume.

I didn't need a theremin identical to this one, I just needed an instrument that worked in the same way. In other words, I needed a theremin she could make and operate with magitech.

"Can you show me more?"

"Sure."

At Doc Babylon's request, I loaded up more theremin videos. Some were performances, while others were explanations of the mechanics. I also showed her some theremin schematics I'd found on the internet.

After going through the videos for about an hour, she gave me a small nod.

"If I had the actual article in front of me, I could just use **[Analyze]** on it...but I think I can make sense of what you've given me. A Babylon theremin should be possible."

Seriously? You might be a perverted freak, but you sure are a genius...

"There's something missing, however. In order to replicate the sound, I'll require a rare mineral that's known as radiore, or reverbium."

"Mmm... I gotta collect it, huh? Where's it at?"

"You needn't worry about that. We should have at least three lots of it in the storehouse. Lucky you."

Oh, seriously? There's some in the storehouse? That's a load off my mind.

Oh, how wrong I was...

I went to the storehouse thinking things would be easily dealt with, but it wasn't so simple at all.

"Mamma mia... Isn't this-a right?" Lileleparshe, the gynoid charged with taking care of the storehouse, said as she summoned various boxes. None of them had what I was looking for.



Babylon's treasures and legacy were all managed by the storehouse, which was on the lowest level of the floating facility. The items were stored in boxes beneath the structure and summoned using a black monolith controller.

The boxes were all numbered, and I'd taken great care to compile a full list of the contents some time ago...

"It would-a seem that some of the boxes were-a numbered wrong. Some of the contents were improperly stored-a too."

"You can't even keep things straight here?"

Some might have found her ditziness charming. I certainly didn't. She made up for her own clumsiness with more stupidity, and I certainly didn't have the patience for it. To make matters worse, she was the type who seemed competent at a glance...so it was kind of a double whammy when she messed up.

"That's enough. Just summon all the boxes into the main atrium."

"All-a three hundred at once?"

"Gah... Yeah... Slow and steady wins the race... We'll sort through them all. Just summon them slowly, one at a time."

"Capisco!"

One after another, square boxes sprouted out of the storehouse floor...and before long, three hundred boxes, ranging from small to large, were lined up in a big row.

I began opening them one at a time, confirming whether or not they contained the thing I needed. If I came across anything mislabeled or mispackaged, then I fixed it up.

In total, I spent about five hours opening all the boxes and putting the contents back correctly. Yes, I even put them back... I couldn't trust the gynoid with it.

"Where was it?!"

"Hm? What's-a wrong?"

"Don't gimme that! What do you think?!"

I'd opened up every box that matched under the search conditions, but I hadn't found any radiore at all. Was Doc Babylon just wrong or something? Or was the radiore in another box somewhere deep in the storehouse? The three hundred brought up by my search conditions were hard enough to find...

"Oh... Wait. Radiore? It should-a be reverbium, no?" Parshe said as she curiously looked over the letters floating on the monolith.

Wait, don't tell me...

"...I forgot-a to file radiore as an alternate name..."

"YOU FORGOT WHAAAT?!"

Isn't there a limit to how stupid you can be?! Didn't you just waste five hours of my life?! Wait, no, I guess I got to organize some of the stuff...but still!

"Wah!"

Just as I was about to stomp my foot in fury, a box came up right underneath me and bowled me off my feet. I fell flat on my ass.

"A-Ah! That was an accident-a!"

I clenched my teeth together as I staggered back to my feet. I felt like a vein was about to burst in my skull.

I slowly regained my composure before opening up the box. There were three hunks of blue rock with golden stripes running across them. It was the radiore.

...So it was here the whole time. If she'd just had radiore as a listed term alongside reverbium, then this could've been avoided...

"I-I'll help-a you take this to the research laboratory!"

"Nope! I'm good, thanks! I'll take it on my own! You must be tired, so stay here and rest!"

"If-a you're sure..."

I desperately resisted Parshe's attempt to help me.

No way! If you try to assist me, I'll lose this stone!

I tossed the radiore into **[Storage]** and dashed away from the storehouse as fast as possible.

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"Welcome back. You're a bit late, aren't you?"

"Don't say a damn thing..."

Doc Babylon's words pierced me to the core. The storehouse was hell itself, and I didn't want to visit it again any time soon.

I handed over the radiore and asked the doc to make a theremin with it. I would've preferred to have made it myself, but it was way too complex for me. I made a cute frame for it, at least. Something a young girl would appreciate. It was even cherry blossom pink, to match Sakura and Yoshino's hair.

I left that to Babylon and decided on the next present to tackle.

Quun wanted a magical tool, right? Hmm... Maybe I can find something like that in the storehouse, but I don't want to go back there. Not today, at least.

Plus, Quun probably knew about all the stuff in the storehouse already.

She wanted an interesting one, right? Does that mean it has to be one of a kind? Hmm... Maybe I could just give her a theremin too? Nah, that'd be a bit tacky.

If our magic tools weren't enough, then one from another country would have to do the trick.

Luckily, I knew exactly where to go, so I opened up a [Gate] and hopped on in.

Haaah... I'm shooting all over the place to grant these wishes... Is this how stars feel when people wish on them?

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"An interesting magical tool, eh?"

The oil-stained woman standing before me was Berlietta, the former princess of Strain. Though that was a title she'd discarded once she'd married Lupheus, first prince of Triharan.

I'd come to Triharan to visit this odd couple, and I found them in a small mechanic's garage outside the imperial palace. I wondered if it was really okay for the crown princess to be standing here in oil-slicked coveralls, but it wasn't my place to comment.

"I have a few magical tools laying around, but they're mostly things I've tinkered with. I don't think they'd compare to anything Elluka could've come up with."

Hrm... Maybe I was wrong thinking Berlietta would have something unique to offer, then.

"Triharan royalty doesn't have much in the way of historical tools of interest either... Not anymore, at least. Our heritage items were all sold when the Senate took control..." Lupheus said, speaking up as he continued tinkering with the EV in the middle of the room.

...Should the crown prince really be laying down under a car with a wrench in his hand? These two really were made for each other, huh?

Nothing about this couple had changed since the last time I'd seen them, which was precisely what I'd been hoping for.

I had told them the gist of the situation, that I needed an interesting piece of magical technology for a young girl who was related to me, but they didn't really have anything particular in mind.

"Grand Duke, surely you can make a one-of-a-kind magical tool, no?" Berlietta said, stating the obvious as if it were a bold new idea.

That was the first thing I'd thought of too, but... Well, I'd already made most of the most interesting electronic devices I could think of. My castle had a washing machine, a fridge-freezer, and more smartphones than you could count. I wasn't sure what I could make that I hadn't already created.

Hell, even she had already made interesting stuff like powered suits.

"If I were to receive an interesting magical tool, I'd opt for something I could improve myself. Like this EV here."

"Oh, yes, I agree. It's rather fun to tinker with, isn't it?"

Hmm... Something you can modify and improve freely, huh? Like the Frame Gear or powered suits she likes to play around with... I guess that makes sense. So if we're going for something in that vein, then how about a vehicle?

"Maybe she'd like a bike."

"A what?"

"Uhhh...it's like an Ether Vehicle, but it has two wheels and is for fewer passengers."

"Two wheels? Like a vehicle that only has wheels at the front or the rear?"

"Uh, not quite..."

Lupheus was apparently imagining something like a cart with two wheels. It was a pain in the ass to explain what was going on, so I just pulled up some pictures on my phone. Then, I pulled up a video of a motorcycle doing a few laps.

“Amazing! It’s really running on just two wheels!”

“How can it lean in like that without losing balance?! Oh! The driver’s knees are almost touching the ground!”

The video of the motorbike race had them glued to the screen. We watched the race until one of the contestants suddenly swerved on a corner and fell from his bike. The two were shocked at first, but breathed a sigh of relief when the racer got back up. His bike wasn’t quite so unharmed, however.

“As you can see, motorbikes are a bit more unstable than Ether Vehicles. It’s really easy to get injured if you get in an accident while on it, which is why riders wear special suits and helmets.”

Hmm, maybe it’s not such a good idea to make one of these for Quun... She’d definitely take safety precautions, though.

“Interesting... So it’s a potentially dangerous vehicle, then.”

“It’s likely unstable due to the two wheels. Standard Ether Vehicles have four wheels because it’s the most sensible design...but, hm... Could you not make a safer bike with three wheels?”

“I mean... Tricycles do exist, but...”

I wasn’t sure if Quun would appreciate receiving a tricycle as a gift.

Although...maybe a three-wheeler motorcycle? She might like that.

I pulled up a search for three-wheeled motorcycles, and there were a lot of results.

“Yes, if we used a compact design based on these outlines then it’d be much safer. We can improve the size of the tires for stability too.”

“How wonderful! Some designs have two wheels at the front, while others have two at the back.”

“Why not both?! I’ll make the former, while you make the latter.”

“Got it!”

Huh? You’re making two of them now? And two different ones at that? I only came here to ask for ideas, guys...

“The chassis will need to be small if it’s for a child!”

“Let’s consider speed limiters as well! Oh, and a heavy frame sounds good! For durability!”

I’d started them down this path, so it wasn’t my place to stop them at this point. Thus, I simply sighed and let them get on with it.

I could’ve just taken the idea to Rosetta at the workshop, but I’d gone and pushed these two off the deep end by mistake, so now I had to see them see it through.

Hrm... It’s never simple around here, is it?

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I helped them out by forming various parts using **[Modeling]**, and in just under two days the two of them were finished with their inventions.

Two motorized trikes stood before me in the Triharan garage.

The one with two wheels at the front was pretty compact and looked more like a scooter. The design allowed you to sit on it with your legs close together. You could even wear a skirt on it without worrying about anything showing.

The one with the two rear wheels looked more like a traditional motorbike. The wheels at the rear had much thicker tires for extra

stability too. The chassis itself was child-sized, but I could still see an adult being able to get on it. It was also adjustable. The seat could move back allowing for more or less leg room.

We completed test drives for both of them, and they moved smoothly and safely. That meant my present for Quun was now complete. There was only one problem...

If I gave both to Quun, the other kids might complain that she got two presents. It'd certainly be unfair for her to get two gifts while the others got one, which meant I needed to pick and choose one to give her.

The only question was which one... The scooter model certainly seemed easier to ride, so I ended up picking that one.

"I went to great pains to make mine, you know...?"

Berlietta, whose trike I hadn't chosen, glanced nervously in my direction as I laid hands on the other one. She was probably afraid of me taking it, the damn tech junkie.

"I'm not taking both, so you guys can keep this one. I just want the blueprints."

"Oh, thank you!"

The trike I'd chosen technically belonged to me, as I had supplied all the materials and commissioned the two to make it.

At the end of the day, I wasn't going to let them keep the one I wanted, since that would've defeated the whole purpose of my visit. Thankfully, they seemed to be completely fine with receiving the other trike in lieu of the commission payment.

Taking Berlietta's blueprints instead of her actual trike was better, anyway. That way, Quun could make her own if she wanted.

I took the blueprints and the front-two-wheeler trike, tossed them into my **[Storage]**, and I thanked the two before returning to

Brunhild. They didn't really see me off, though. They were too engrossed in their latest invention to care.

Now then, just two to go... Arcia and Linne...

I wasn't exactly sure what kind of exotic ingredients Arcia wanted, nor was I entirely sure about Linne's desired finishing move... Thus, I decided to just get Arcia's out of the way, since it seemed more straightforward.

What's exotic for her, though? Like something rare, or fabled? What kind of ingredients would I associate with being rare or exotic back on Earth? Matsutake mushrooms, maybe? Nah, they're a bit too common. You can get them in any supermarket.

The most fantastical ingredient in this world was Dragon meat. Most people couldn't kill a Dragon, after all. And even when someone did, the meat was traded at such a high price that it was out of the reach of the masses.

Dragon meat would be the obvious answer... If we didn't regularly cook with it. To Arcia, Dragon meat was as mundane as chicken. And so, I had no choice but to turn to my castle's foremost culinary expert.

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"An exotic ingredient, eh?"

"Mhm. What's something that's almost impossible to find? Putting aside dragon meat, that is."

The obvious person to ask here was Lu. She was an imperial princess, so she'd eaten fine dining since the moment she was born. I reasoned that if there was something Lu had never eaten, then Arcia had surely never eaten it either.

"I see... If we're talking rare, then abyssal shark roe, blackstone shrooms, and roughbird liver would be the usual things I'd list off...but those can be rather easily acquired for the right coin."

Yeah, those are all A-rank ingredients for sure, but I'm after S-rank stuff.

"I suppose... Behemoth meat."

"Really?"

Those giant things? They're actually tasty? I've killed a few, but have never thought about eating them. Hell, I sold most of the carcasses from my encounters with them.

"Well, Touya, as you know, magical beasts contain an infusion of magical elements in their bodies. This magical element enriches the flesh and deepens the flavor."

"Yeah. That's why Dragon meat tastes so good, right?"

Stronger monsters typically had a higher concentration of magic in their systems, so the logic usually went that the stronger the monster, the tastier its flesh.

"Behemoths are magical beasts who have been exposed to entire wells of mana, taking in so much that their bodies become oversized and mutated. Therefore, their bodies are so rich with magical elements that it's said their flesh is a grade above any other creature's."

That made a lot of sense. In fact, I was surprised I hadn't put that together before. If magical elements determined good taste, and it was an abundance of that magic that made Behemoths so big...then it stood to reason that they'd be the tastiest beasts of all.

"Not just any Behemoth meat will do, however. Take that scorpion beast, for example, Scorpionus. Its base species didn't taste especially

good, so even enriched by its Behemoth transformation, it wouldn't taste much better than low-grade beef."

Oh, right. So if it's a species that doesn't taste great from the outset, it won't make a difference? Actually, it might be the exact opposite. Maybe the magical element would make a bad-tasting thing taste even worse, amplifying the bitter taste? Yuck!

"If you're going to target a Behemoth for meat, then you should go for one that mutated from a species that was already delicious. Cattle, pigs, or birds... Oh, fish would work well too."

Hmm... We already encountered one like that back on Palerius Island, right? Hilde killed that gigantic power bison, I remember... So that's the kind of meat I need, eh?

Sadly, while I kept the crafting materials, we sold the meat to the people of Palerius. They were living in a sealed city, so their food supplies were dwindling. It certainly wasn't a decision I regretted either.

Well, whatever. Just gotta find a tasty-looking Behemoth and kill it for meat, right? That's hardly difficult.

The only issue would be sourcing such a tasty foe.

"Run search... Behemoths that count as cows, pigs, birds, or fish."

"Searching... Search complete."

A bunch of pins dropped down on my map. More than I'd expected, even. I wondered if you could really call it exotic if there were so many sources just roaming around...but then quickly realized there were only around ten in the whole world, so it was definitely pretty exotic. Plus, once you killed one, there was no guarantee another would ever show up again. That was the sheer definition of exotic.

Hmm, which one to go for? The ones in the ocean are definitely fish, while the flying ones have gotta be birds.

I wasn't sure if I felt like going to the trouble of a nautical or aerial battle, though...

Do I want beef or pork? A pig would probably be easier to handle than a cow... I could also go for some pork cutlets right about now. Hmm... Yeah, let's go with pork. Pigs it is.

I searched more specifically and found two pig Behemoths. One was in the snowy mountains of Elfrau, while the other was in a mountain range amid Yulong's ruins.

I couldn't hunt in Elfrau's territory without permission, so Yulong was the safe bet.

"Touya."

"Hm? What is it?"

Lu looked up at me with pleading eyes.

"...You'll, um... You'll let me have some of that meat, won't you?"

"...Oh, uh... Yeah... Of course..."

I folded... I guess she's worried I'll only let Arcia try it. I don't think she'll mind if I give Lu some, so it's whatever. Actually, if I give Lu some, it might inspire the two of them to have a contest to make the yummiest dish! Hell, since it'll be their first time working with the stuff, Arcia'll probably consider it even and fair.

I decided to head off hunting right away. Pork was going to be back on the menu.

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"Oh... It was that kind of pig..."

I pinched my brow and sighed as I stared at the porcine Behemoth in front of me.

It was an enormous boar with shaggy black fur and ridiculously oversized tusks.

Boars are pigs too, I guess...

I'd killed a boar Behemoth back on Palerius Island. It was called a Grand Boar or something like that. Apparently, I'd slaughtered an entire rare beast on that island without even realizing it.

The black boar in front of me was different from the Grand Boar, however. It resembled a Black Fang Boar. I'd heard that it was quite the tasty species.

I'd hunted regular Fang Boars before, but this was my first time seeing a black one...even if it was considerably oversized. I wondered if it would taste like Berkshire pork, but quickly realized it probably wouldn't. If I remembered right, Berkshire pork was a species that had been specifically bred to taste good, and it was known internationally as kurobuta pork. A wild beast like this wouldn't taste as good as a selectively bred pig, at least not on its own... Though, it was a Behemoth, so there was still a chance it could taste even better.

"HOOOIIIIINKH!"

The black boar Behemoth lunged toward me. My Reginleif was in the middle of a tune-up, so I would have to fight this one on the ground.

I didn't think just slashing or shooting it with Brunhild would do the trick either. Thus, I quickly started chanting, casting **[Iron Wall]** and manifesting a twenty-meter-high and four-meter-thick wall of metal out of the ground at my feet.

The Black Fang Boar was unable to stop its own momentum, sending it smashing full speed into the sudden obstacle in its path. A dull thud rang out into the surrounding area as it smashed its head into the iron wall, leaving a big dent in the back of it.

Holy cow, how strong is this thing?! It seriously made a dent?!

Just as I was marveling at the Behemoth's power, I heard the dull thud again... It wasn't dead, and it wasn't done smashing into the wall, apparently.

"No way... Seriously?"

I used **[Fly]** to rush up into the sky and look down at the situation...only to catch the Black Fang Boar running back and charging the wall another three times.

...It's bleeding from the head. Why's it still hitting the wall?

After the third violent crash, the metal structure warped and crumbled before fading away entirely. The wall had been formed from magic in the earth, so it was destined to either disappear after a certain period of time or fade away after sustaining a certain amount of damage. It wasn't as durable as real forged iron either. It was still iron, however, so the fact that it had been so thoroughly smashed was no small feat.

The Black Fang Boar let out a triumphant roar upon felling its inanimate foe.

I narrowed my eyes and realized it wasn't just bellowing at random, but up at me. It was as if it was taunting me, trying to tell me it had overcome my trick.

...You're pretty good...but not good enough.

I snapped my fingers and cast **[Waterball]**, launching a sphere of water about ten meters in diameter over at the black fang boar. The orb struck the Behemoth square in the head, enveloping its nose and mouth in the water. It began to gargle and thrash around, desperate for air, but it couldn't stop itself from drowning where it stood.

Behemoths were strong, but they were still regular living creatures. A boar couldn't breathe underwater, so a giant boar couldn't either. The Black Fang Boar thrashed its head around, desperate to shake

the orb off its face, but it was to no avail. It couldn't even move away, as I'd used my magic to fix its limbs to the floor.

Eventually, it fell limp and motionless to the floor. It was still alive, but it wouldn't be alive for much longer. I dissipated the orb of water, used Earth magic to dig a huge pit beneath it, and then used **[Levitation]** to dangle it upside down in the air. When it was floating in front of me, I used Wind magic to slice open its throat, draining the blood into the pit I'd just dug.

Black Fang Boars weren't just renowned for their meat, after all. Their tusks and fur made good raw materials. This was the most efficient way to kill it without damaging its valuable pelt, even if it was somewhat harsh.

"I'll have the adventurer's guild take you apart and ask them to set aside the meat for me."

I pulled out my phone and called up Relisha, checking if she'd be able to disassemble a Behemoth for me as soon as possible.

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I used **[Gate]** to summon the monster dismantling team to the Yulong mountain range.

First off, I asked them to harvest the best meat. They prioritized the loin, shoulder, rib, fatty meat, and tenderloin (the cut that made the best cutlets). I was going to get all of the meat later, but for now, I needed enough for Arcia.

It was at this point that I was a little amused by the prospect of getting raw meat as a gift for a child, but it was what she wanted, so who was I to judge?

Either way, that was it for Arcia, so only Linne's wish remained. She had wished for a finishing move...or something to that effect. I could

assume she didn't mean a move that literally finished people off. She probably meant some cool or flashy attack.

I personally felt her **[Gravity]** and **[Shield]** combo already fell into that category.

Yae's Kokonoe techniques and Hilde's Lestian attacks were probably the kind of moves Linne must have had in mind. Though, Elze and Ende had their special ki attacks too. Linne probably felt a bit left out without having something truly crazy to call her own.

I guess asking Uncle Takeru would be best, right? He's literally the god of combat. Maybe there's some easy answer I'm missing that'll help me figure it out.

I went to Takeru to ask, but he flat-out told me that there was no easy answer. Apparently, I'd hit a dead end.

"There's no simple guide to it, but you could always learn the martial arts and record them for her to learn from."

"Huh? Me?"

...Do I look like I have time to learn martial arts and start recording my journey in an esoteric tome or something?

"Wait, it doesn't have to be me... Can't I just ask Ende or Elze to do that?"

"Ende's a natural genius who learns new abilities intuitively. I doubt he could properly record or explain his techniques to others. Conversely, Elze is a destructive force all by herself, which isn't something you can communicate in text."

Ugh... I guess that's true. Whenever I ask Elze about how she fights, she always says stuff like, "Well, first you go bam! Then, you twist around and go thwack!"

Her explanations were always hard to decipher... I was amazed she could understand herself.

In Ende's case, he was the kind of person who'd go over something complicated and then act like it wasn't a big deal at all. I was not exactly a fan of natural geniuses like him.

Takeru was somewhat similar, but he was definitely better at explaining the processes. It was probably that similarity between them that led to Ende and him becoming such fast friends.

*...Do I really have to learn martial arts myself? And do I really have to write it all down? Wait, no. Can't I just use a crystal ball to record a video that explains finishing moves, then enchant it to play back the recording with **[Mirage]**? That way Linne can just watch it and learn.*

"Could I record you doing a special finishing move?"

"I suppose so, but wouldn't it be better to have me do it on a target rather than thin air?"

Takeru had a point. It'd be easier to understand how to use the move against a foe if there was a foe having it used on them in the video. Thus, I decided to go and get a lucky volunteer to receive Takeru's beatdown. It couldn't be me, of course. I had to record. Luckily, I had the perfect guy in mind...

"Why me?!"

"You're his best student, so you're best suited to dealing with him. That's just how it is, man."

I grinned slightly as Ende stood there grumbling.

I'd dragged him here by opening up a **[Gate]** under his feet. He'd initially refused, but then I told him Allis would appreciate having the recording to learn from and he reluctantly agreed to participate.

Technically, Ende would be getting beaten up in this video, so he might've had some reservations about letting his daughter see that. But sometimes a father had to make sacrifices for the good of his child.

“Now, what kinda attack do you wanna see? I could do one that drains my life span in exchange for an ultimate strike that guarantees a killing blow...”

“Absolutely not!” Ende and I yelled in unison.

I didn’t want my daughter to learn something terrible, no way! But that said, I wasn’t exactly sure what kind of attack I wanted to show her. She wouldn’t be too happy if it was something difficult. An attack that would take her years to even begin grasping didn’t exactly make for a good gift.

On the other hand, showing her a really simple attack wouldn’t be very interesting either. Thus, we needed to hit a happy medium.

“How about I beat up on Ende here with a couple of intermediate-grade attacks, and we pick the one that looks simplest?”

“Sure. Let’s do that.”

“Hwah?! Don’t I get any input here?!”

Ende tried to protest, but it was too late. Takeru and I had already decided that this was the best path forward.

“Okay, go!”

I stood a good distance away from the two of them and began recording with my phone. Yet for some reason, by the time my recording had started, the screen showed only Takeru. Where had Ende gone?

“Bwauuugh?!”

I glanced upward just in time to see Ende crashing to the ground.

Huh? Did Takeru hit him that fast?

“As you can see, I instantly charged beneath my enemy’s bosom and drove my entire body’s force through my palms to strike him upward in the blink of an eye...”

“Wait, wait, hold on! Uncle Takeru! You went too fast! I couldn’t catch that on video at all!”

I had to stop Takeru mid-explanation. He’d done it so fast that I hadn’t even hit the record button before Ende was halfway to the stratosphere. I wouldn’t be able to record a thing at this rate.

“Sorry, Ende. Let’s go again.”

“Wurgh...”

I cast a recovery spell on Ende while giving him a supportive thumbs-up.

Don’t glare at me, man! That one wasn’t my fault!

Ende staggered to his feet and faced Uncle Takeru once more. He stood in a defensive stance this time around. His arms were crossed and his hands were protecting his jaw.

This time I pressed the record button before calling out for them to begin.

“Okay, now you can...”

“Bwroguh?!”

Ende was once again catapulted up into the sky, landing in a heap a few seconds later.

Seriously?! That was way too fast! I couldn’t see you move!

“As you can see, I instantly charged beneath my enemy’s bosom and drove my body’s force through my palms to strike him upward in the blink of an eye...”

“Hold it! Stop! Hold on!”

I had to stop Uncle Takeru mid-explanation again.

I went over the video I'd recorded at the slowest possible speed, frame by frame, but even then, I couldn't see Takeru move. Ende was just blasted into the sky.

How fast is he?! He's going beyond the recording speed!

"You're too fast! You need to go slower so we can use it as a proper instructional video!"

"If I go slower, I won't be using my actual technique."

"Ugh... I get it, but... Well, okay. How about you do the technique, then slowly explain it while showing all the parts of it in sequence?"

"Oh, I see. That works, yes. Come, Ende. Once more!"

"Up you go, Ende."

"Gimme a break..."

We had to do a few retakes, but eventually, I got footage of a few special attacks. I edited the video together and enchanted it into a crystal ball. I could've just sent the video to Linne's phone, but I felt like that took away from the magic of it being a present.

I also made one for Ende to pass on to Allis. For some reason, he didn't say anything to me when I saw him off. He just stared and groaned. Still, I had a feeling he'd feel a lot better once he saw his daughter's smiling face. It was all for the greater good.

That was the end of Linne's wish, which meant I'd granted them all. I felt a bit weird about granting wishes for all my kids except Kuon, though. I wanted to give him something that'd make him happy, but what would that something be? I knew he enjoyed putting dioramas together, so something related to that seemed like a safe bet. He'd gotten pretty excited that one time I'd shown him all those different dioramas, after all.

Oh, maybe I could get some videos on diorama-making?

I was a little curious, so I looked it up on a popular video hosting site. There was a massive number of videos to choose from. I was amazed, as I hadn't expected it to be such a popular hobby.

All right, great. I'll stitch some of these videos together and enchant them into a crystal ball like Linne's here.

It felt a little low-effort, but I had a feeling he'd still be happy.

The theremin for Yoshino was also complete, so now I had everything. The only question that remained was how I was going to deliver the presents...but I had a certain idea in mind. It had to do with an old custom from Earth...a rather classic way of preparing gifts.



The next morning, all of my children woke up with a present by their bedside. They were initially unsure what to think, but after a little urging from their mothers, they opened up their boxes.

At first, though, Linne and Kuon didn't quite seem to understand what they were looking at, which was a bit understandable, since they'd just been presented with crystal balls without any explanation.

Thankfully, I'd written out accompanying cards detailing what each of their presents contained. Once they read those, they smiled wide.

Yoshino didn't seem to realize what a theremin was at a glance, but once she read her card and realized it was a musical instrument, she immediately started playing with it.

I'm glad she's happy, but maybe I should've reconsidered giving her this? The sound of a theremin so early in the morning is a little jarring...

Yakumo gleefully swung her hoshi-kiri tachi around, while Frei lashed her whipsword through the air. Quun merrily rode around on her

trike. The sound of the theremin was flowing out nonstop from Yoshino's room, and Arcia had already taken the Behemoth meat to the kitchen and begun working on her next master dish. Elna was practically buried in the bosom of the giant stuffed panda she'd received, while Linne was studying her video, moving her body here and there as if memorizing the motions. Kuon was pondering his orb, attentively picking over every detail of the diorama instructional video I'd put together for him.



It'd been a lot of work putting all of it together, but seeing my kids happy made all the effort worth it.

"Wishing upon a star... I wish I had made a wish as well, I do."

"Right? I'd wish for our busy husband to calm down and do something with us."

Yae and Sue started jabbering about something that annoyed them, but I pretended not to hear.

"I'd wish for a grimoire, something new that you couldn't even find in Babylon's library."

"I-I'd want some romantic novels and manga from Earth..."

"Oh, if we could get things from Earth, then I'd want a new idol song to learn..."

Leen, Linze, and Sakura joined in.

Crap... Don't tell me I've gotta grant all your wishes too!

It wasn't that I wasn't happy to get them gifts, but it'd be better if they gave me six months or a year of notice or something.

"I already received a present from Touya, so..."

"That was just leftovers from the meat he got for Arcia, no? Although I suppose that was a present, wasn't it...?"

I could sense my other wives narrow their eyes at Lu, who spoke with a sense of pride and just a little bit of gloating.

I-It was just leftovers! Please don't turn this into a thing...

"Touya?"

"Eep!"

My voice was completely gone. Yumina was smiling at me, but there was a great invisible pressure welled up behind her. I could feel the pressure emanating from all of my wives...except Lu.

“The Mochizuki family motto is what, Touya? All wives are equal, yes? You understand, yes?”

“O-Of course I understand! Of course!”

This was my first time hearing about this apparent family motto, but I could only assume it had been created without my knowledge.

L-Look, I agree! I agree! Just gimme a minute to rest! I’ve had a rough time! I’m tired! Obviously, I’m not gonna say that out loud, but... Bwuh, fine...

I decided to just suck it up and do as my wives asked. It took me the whole day to grant their wishes, and it wiped me out pretty hard. Thankfully, they weren’t children, so their wishes weren’t quite as unreasonable. Linze and Sakura’s wishes were easily downloaded via my phone too. The only one that gave me real trouble was Leen’s wish, which was a grimoire you couldn’t find in Babylon’s library.

Luckily, I’d promised King Felsen a whipblade of his own, so I had him permit me to copy the contents of his family grimoire in lieu of a cash payment. It wasn’t a particularly powerful tome, but it had some interesting stuff in it.

By the time I finished, night had fallen. I sat out on the balcony, gazing up at the dark sky. From the corner of my vision, I spied a shooting star. It felt like a bit of a mean-spirited joke. I’d certainly had more than my fair share of wishes as of late.

I decided to set a rule that you could only make a wish on a star once a year. That seemed fair to me. I also figured we should probably make it a children-only event, like Christmas. That would probably be fine. Might be a bit unfair to parents, though.

I saw another star streak across the black sea above me. It was as if it was trying to urge me to make a wish of my own.

“I wish...to take a break tomorrow... To take a break tomorrow... To take a break tomorrow...”

The shooting star glimmered in the sky above as if to answer my prayers. Perhaps tomorrow would be a peaceful day...



Afterword

Hello again, and thank you for reading *In Another World With My Smartphone Volume 26*. I hope you had fun!

First off, I'd like to apologize. Last volume I teased the arrival of Touya's final child, but that won't be happening until the next volume. That's inexcusable on my part, so I'm sorry.

As it turned out, if we included the arrival of the final child in volume 26, then the volume would either be incredibly long or we'd have to cut it halfway and leave it on a cliff-hanger. In either case, I wouldn't have been able to include any original interlude content.

But then, I realized that moving the final child's story to the next volume would mean I'd have to write about four times as much original content for this volume compared to my usual stuff. And so, in the end, I managed to hit a happy medium by including one new original interlude and one story I'd written in the past, but never had a chance to publish anywhere. That kind of makes this volume largely unrelated to the progression of the main story, but I hope you enjoyed it regardless.

Anyway, let's move to brighter news! You might've heard already, but *In Another World With My Smartphone* has been picked up for a second anime season! I can't wait! I've kind of known for a while, though... I had to stay quiet that whole time.

The first time I learned my series was getting an anime, I received a phone call about it and only had to wait about half a year for the announcement. This time, though? I had to wait a full year.

Whenever someone would ask me about the possibility of a second season, I had to steel myself and remain quiet...but now I can say it with my chest puffed out with pride. We're getting a second season! Thanks to everyone who enjoyed the first season, and thanks to

everyone for supporting the books so far. I couldn't have done this without you!

There are people who watched the show on all kinds of websites, all over the world, and I have to say that the Western attention on the series definitely gave it a push in the right direction.

The anime won't be out for quite some time, but at least Japanese readers have the drama CDs to tide them over for the time being. We're all working our hardest, so I hope you stick with us through the second season too.

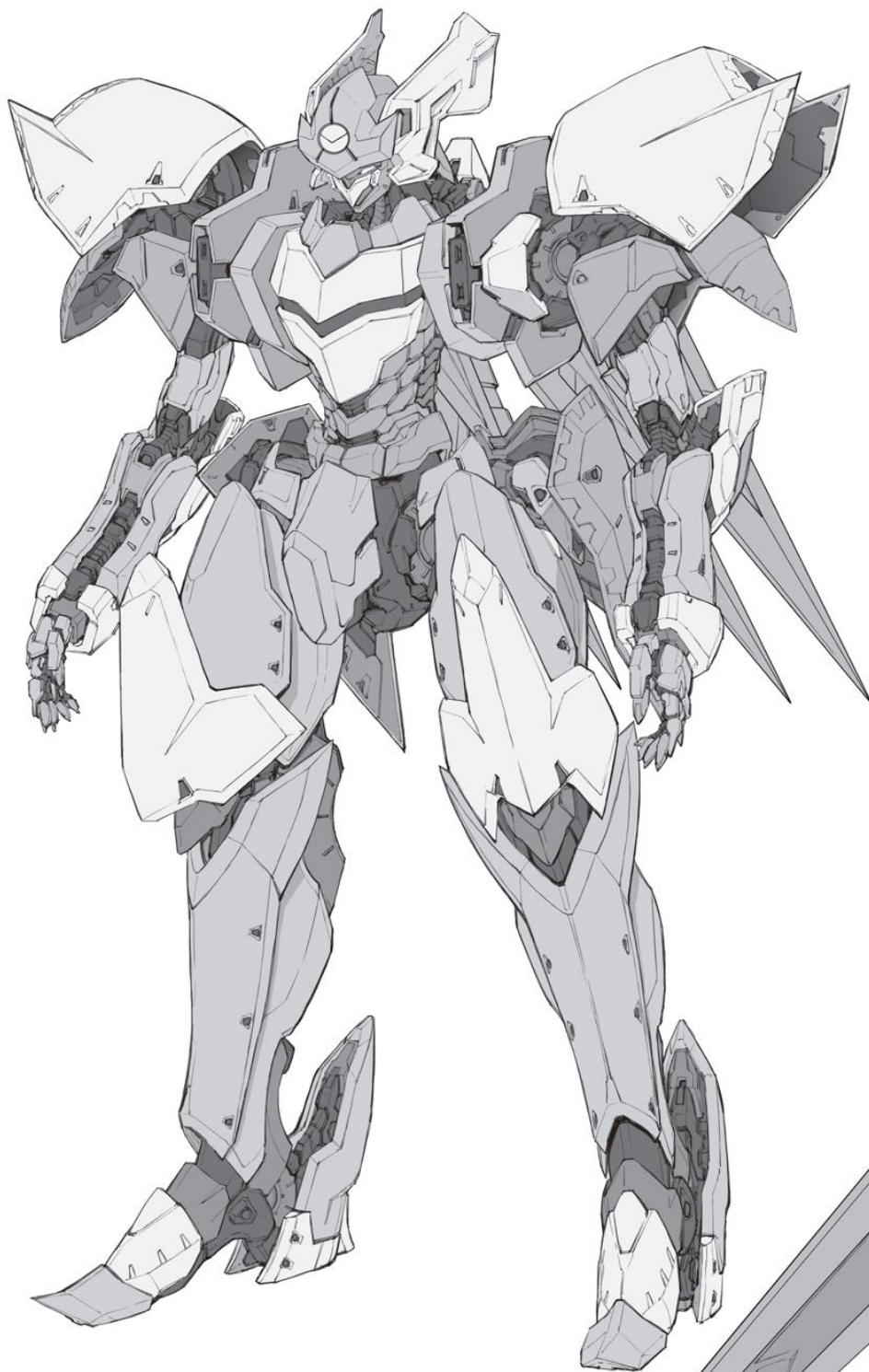
Anyway, time for my usual thanks.

My illustrator, Eiji Usatsuka. I want to thank you as ever for your wonderful pictures, and I can't wait to see what you come up with in the next volume. Tomofumi Ogasawara, the man behind all the mech designs in the series, thank you so much for taking time away from your busy schedule to illustrate Brunnhilde. You brought all the details to life. And of course, K and the Hobby Japan editorial department. You have my thanks, as does everyone involved with the publication of this volume.

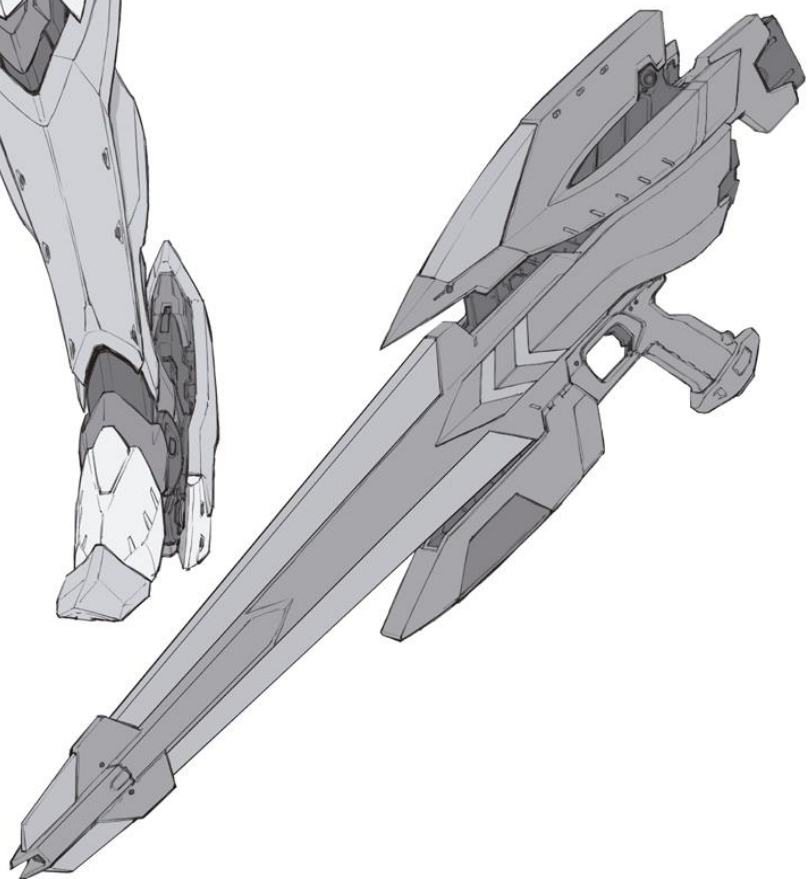
Finally, thank you to everyone who read my webnovel, as well as everyone reading this book right now.

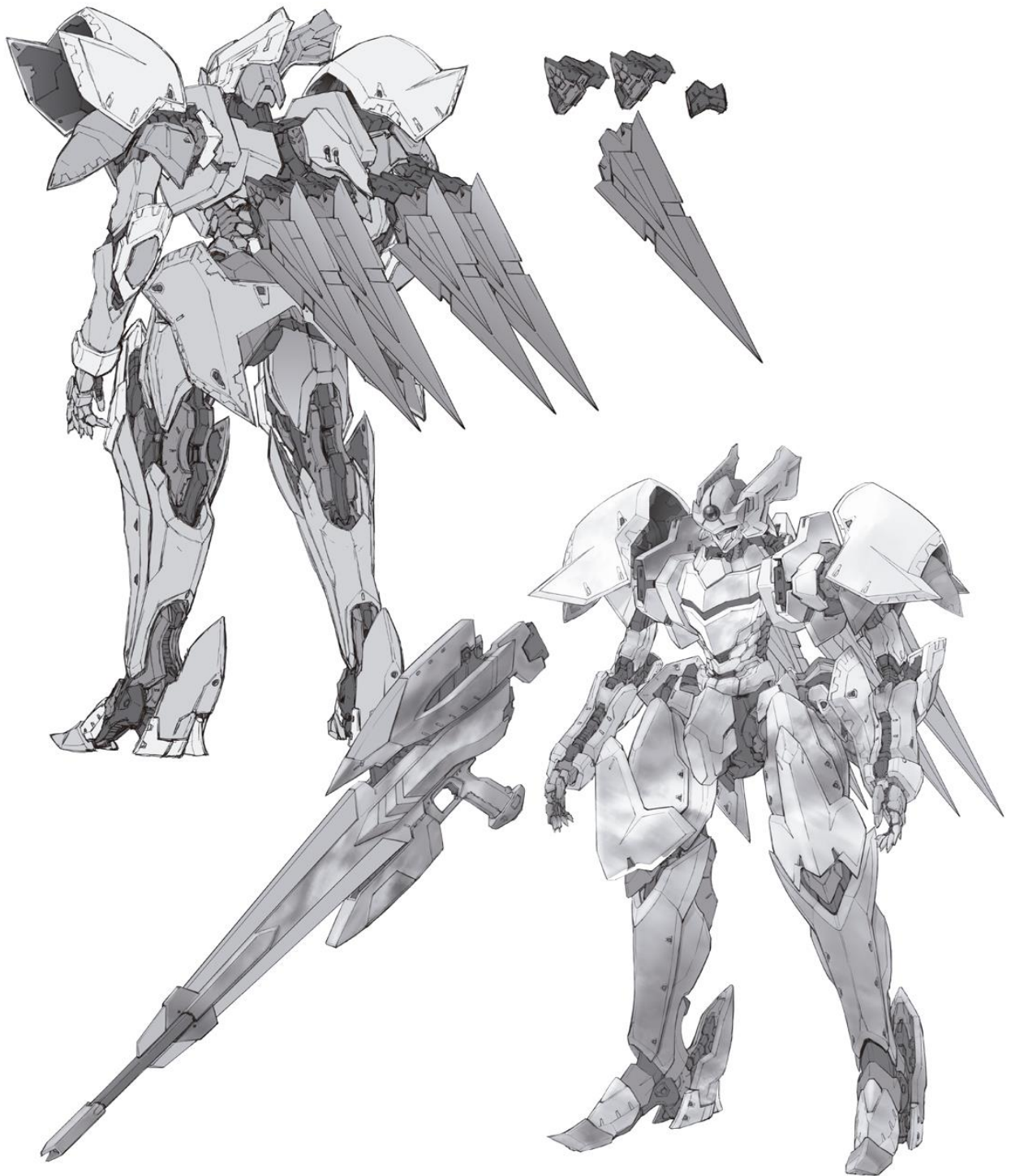
Patora Fuyuhara

In Another World With My Smartphone
Mecha Design Specs



Brunnhilde





Developer: Regina Babylon
Maintainer: High Rosetta
Affiliation: Duchy of Brunhild
Height: 16.6m Weight: 7.t
Maximum Capacity: 1 Person
Armaments: High-Precision Sniper Rifle, Fragarach x4

Bone Frame Designer: Regina Babylon
Administrator: Fredmonica
Compatible Pilot: Yumina Ernea Belfast
Primary Color: Silver

A new special-model Frame Gear designed specifically for Yumina. One of the Valkyrie Gears, this Frame Gear was designed with ranged combat in mind. The armor is outfitted with a special chameleon function that uses mirror magic to help blend the entire Frame Gear in with its surroundings. It's an incredibly stealthy machine, and requires extreme precision to pilot efficiently.



Bonus Short Stories

The Mithril Cloak

I used [Modeling] to thin out a mithril ingot. First it was rolled into a rod that was about ten centimeters in diameter, then five centimeters, then one centimeter, then five millimeters, one millimeter, and eventually, it became half a millimeter, akin to steel wire.

“Is this enough?”

“Not quite, no. If it’s not thinner, it’ll be too stiff when it’s woven. If it’s not as free-flowing as cloth, then that defeats the whole purpose of doing this.”

Linze immediately shot down my question. I tried bending the mithril wire and sure enough, it was still stiff. I didn’t know how much thinner I could make it, or how long it’d take if I thinned it out too much...but if it was what she wanted, I had no choice but to go along with it. I thinned the material down to the width of a single strand of hair, then Linze began to twine it around a rod.

“Can you really make clothes out of mithril, though?”

“Mithril doesn’t suffer from metal fatigue, nor does it break or fray. Plus, if you channel magic into it, you can strengthen the material and make regular clothing with more defensive capabilities than plate armor.”

That would essentially make it like a stab-proof vest... If it was possible to mass-produce, then we’d be able to issue them to our knights. If they wore mithril clothing alongside their regular armor, they’d basically be impervious to blades.

Our knights currently wore chainmail, but that was rather heavy. Thus, a more lightweight defensive garb was exactly what we

needed. It wasn't flammable either...so maybe we could give it to our fire response squad... Though maybe not, since if it was made of metal, it'd get hot in the fire... I didn't know enough about mithril to make a call either way, really.

"What are you doing?" Linne, who happened to be passing by the room, asked as she peeked her head in.

"We're making mithril thread. The plan is to make blade-resistant clothing."

"Mithril clothes? Oh! Can you make me a cloak?!"

I was a little surprised to hear her ask for that, so I asked what brought that idea on. She told me she'd seen an adventurer at the guild who had a cloak that looked cool. It was a simple enough reason... But wait, didn't Linne pride herself on her agility? Wouldn't a cloak just get in the way?

"If it's just a short one that goes to her waist, it should be fine, right?"

"Yeah! Exactly! The adventurer lady had a short one!"

A short cloak sounded simple enough. It'd be good for guarding her against projectiles like arrows that otherwise might have hit her in the shoulder or something. Then again, I didn't really think Linne could get hit by arrows, even if she wanted to. She was far too deft to fall victim to that.

"All right, I'll make it now."

"Wait, like right now?"

Without saying another word, Linze pulled her weaver's loom out of the **[Storage]** function on her phone. Then, she began working with the mithril thread at speeds that defied human comprehension, weaving the cloth into a fashionable cloak that looked to be a perfect

fit for her daughter. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Honestly, it was like watching a video at double speed.

"All done."

"Yay! Thanks, mom!"

Linze handed the cloak over to Linne, who put it on and did a little twirl.

"I'm gonna go show everyone my cool new cloak!" Linne exclaimed before darting out of the room and down the hallway.

"We'll need more mithril thread."

"Huh? What for?"

"The other children are going to want clothes of their own when they see Linne's cloak."

Linze was right. At the very least, Frei or Yoshino would be interested in that kind of thing. My wife and I could do little other than chuckle as I set to work thinning out more mithril.

Short Story: A Model Railway

"Should the track go from here to here?"

"Yes. Oh, and I was thinking the tunnel could go through this mountain."

"Then how about we put a river in this spot?"

"Oh, good call. We can put a bridge over it, then."

Kuon and I were discussing the layout of his latest diorama as we set down the styrofoam-like material. I'd decided that I wanted to do something with him, and this was what we'd settled on: a model railway. Kuon was in charge of the diorama and scenery, while I'd put together the train and its tracks. I created a tiny replica of the magic train with **[Modeling]**, then applied a simple **[Program]** charm to it

that allowed it to run along the rails. To test it out, I set down a basic circular track and it ran without any issues.

“It’ll keep running until the magic wears off...”

“Father, we should consider external power. I also believe it would be more realistic if the lights in the tunnel turned on automatically as the train ran through it.”

“Oh yeah, that does sound more... Wait, Quun?”

I blinked in confusion as I saw my daughter glancing down at the model train. I hadn’t even heard her enter the room.

“This seems quite interesting. Mind if I join you?” Quun asked as she looked up at me with expectant eyes. I found myself unable to resist her request.

“Uh, sure! I guess...”

In all honesty, I welcomed the help. After all, it was quite the undertaking for just me and Kuon. I left Quun in charge of the train, since she could utilize **[Modeling]** and **[Program]** almost as well as I could. Kuon was still busy sculpting decorations for the landscape, so I decided to put together a little town for the train to run through. It wasn’t based on any particular place, so I started to look through photos of houses, buildings, stations, and so on. Then, I created them with **[Modeling]** before passing them over to Kuon. Even though I could make the basic shapes, I still needed him to paint them.

I looked back over at Quun to see what she was doing...only for my jaw to drop in shock. There was a live video feed projected in the air in front of her...the view from the little train.

“I’ve installed a small camera at the front of the magic train, as well as added a function to change the speed. Now you can simulate driving it, or at least gather a close approximation of the experience.”

Quun could cast **[Mirage]**, and she'd used it here to project the illusory vision from the camera she'd installed in the train. I was a little curious, so I tried it out...and it did feel like I was the conductor. Still, I had to stop myself from getting too engrossed in it, since I didn't want to leave Kuon alone.

I started setting down the rails along the diorama that he'd made, ensuring that they were properly fixed together using **[Modeling]**. Part of me lamented the fact that completely smooth rails meant none of that typical train rattling, but I wasn't actually going to be riding on the train, so it didn't really matter.

By the time the sun had set, the model railway was complete. The little magic train ran along the mountains, having completed its test run. As a finishing touch, we put it in a glass case and looked upon our completed creation.

"Mission accomplished!" Kuon exclaimed in excitement.

Linne, Allis, and the others rushed over to look down at the train, curiosity filling their eyes. Kuon and Quun grinned, satisfied looks on their faces. I was satisfied too, since it'd been nice spending a day making something with two of my kids. It made me eager to make something new with them again...but what would come next?

Author's Column: Cooking

Are you any good at cooking? Can't say I am, since I don't do it very often.

Whenever the mood strikes me, I'll cook up things like rice and stir-fried vegetables. The best I can manage are simple, one-serving meals. I'm rather lazy for the most part, and I don't really care about cooking...so most of the food I eat comes pre-prepared.

I was talking to one of my HJ supervisors about this and they said that I could cook frozen gyoza pretty easily, since all I had to do was

cook it according to the instructions. That sounded easy enough, so I bought myself a bag and cooked them according to the steps on the back...but they turned out horrible. The gyoza were so burned that they ended up as charred black lumps. When I told this to my supervisor, they went, “How? How could you possibly mess that up?”

I had no idea either, so I went over everything that had happened... Basically, you’re only supposed to turn the gyoza at the very end, so it wasn’t like I had any idea how well they were cooking. The instructions said something like “cook until the edges crisp up, and that’s when it’s done,” so that’s what I did, and they burned! In the end, we concluded that I’d just overcooked them and that I needed to cook them for a shorter time than the bag had stated. With that in mind, I bought another bag and began my second attempt.

...It didn’t go so well. It went better than last time, but the results weren’t all that great. The gyoza were burned in the middle, but the edges weren’t crispy.

“What?!” my supervisor roared upon hearing that. “All you have to do is cover, steam, cook, and eat! It’s easy!”

Easy, huh? Sure sounded easy to say at least. Anyone with a natural talent for cooking would assume it’s easy, but clearly, I don’t have that gift. Still, I was undeterred at that point, so I began my third attempt in earnest.

It was an unmitigated disaster. The gyoza skin stuck to the pan, the filling spilled out... It got everywhere. I started to think maybe my frying pan was at fault. It didn’t look damaged, but I’d owned it for a few years, so perhaps the Teflon coating had washed off. I inspected it closer and found clear evidence of that very thing happening, so I went and bought a more expensive frying pan and tried to cook gyoza for the fourth time.

It went perfectly. The Teflon must have been the issue, since the gyoza crisped up beautifully. What startled me most was how easily the gyoza slid from the pan to my plate. It wasn't burned or stuck at all. I gorged on the sumptuous feast I'd cooked for myself, content in the knowledge that my previous failures had been the fault of the bad pan, not me!

I was so elated that I forgot to turn the heater off. I left the pan there, burning away as I enjoyed my meal. I didn't notice until I was done with my meal and I suddenly heard warning beeps coming from my kitchen. Tragically, my brand-new frying pan got burned pretty badly... I also found out that heating up a Teflon pan without anything in it is dangerous, since it can lead to the release of toxic gases. Oh, and apparently, if you cool a hot pan too quickly, like I often do, the Teflon wears away faster.

To make a long story short, I'm not very good at cooking.



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In Another World With My Smartphone: Volume 26

by Patora Fuyuhara

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Edited by DxS

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